

**THE
BOY
PROPHET
BY
EDMOND
FLEG**

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The boy prophet

THE BOY PROPHET



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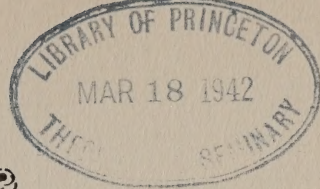
In Preparation

THE LIFE OF SOLOMON
THE WALL OF WEeping

E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

Publishers

NEW YORK



The
BOY PROPHET

EDMOND FLEG

A Translation Made by
D. L. ORNA

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THE BOY PROPHET



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Dedicated
to the Memory of
ISRAEL ZANGWILL



THE BOY PROPHET





How old was I, when I first started to understand? Five, or perhaps four.

But shall I be able to find phrases simple enough, to write as I spoke, as I thought, when I was five? Anyhow, I shall have a try.

It happened at the back of my home, in the garden of Notre Dame, near the steepled fountain, which looks like a baby-chapel near a mother-church.

We were out for a walk: old Elise was holding my hand. A stout, jolly-looking man goes by: he wears a broad-brimmed hat and a black robe. (I have learnt since, it is called a cassock.)

‘What a pretty little chap,’ he says, ‘a real Infant Jesus.’

And then he stoops down and looks at me. His big, kind eyes are close to mine; his cheeks are all criss-crossed with smiles.

‘What is your name, my child?’

‘Claude Levy.’

He stands quite still. His face is still close to mine. But what is the matter? Suddenly his eyes seem far away. And his cheeks look sad.

Elise says in a queer voice:

‘He is a little Jew, Father.’

He replies:

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'What a pity!'
And he walks away.



My mind is at work.

'Nannie, what is that big grey balloon up there in the sky?'

'The Pantheon, my darling.'

'And the boats on the river, where are they going?'

'To foreign parts.'

'And why do you always wear a white cap?'

'I come from Brittany; Breton women wear white caps.'

'And the big house, over there, on this side?'

'That is the church of Notre Dame, the Cathedral, as they call it.'

'And who lives in the Cathedral?'

'Jesus, the Infant Jesus.'

'And they say that I look like little Jesus.'

'Yes, my darling.'

'And a little Jew; what is that?'

No answer.



'Are you comfy in your bye-byes?' . . . 'Yes.' . . .
'Then say your prayers.'

'Dear God, take care of Mummie and of Daddie, who is at the Front. . . . Tell me, Nannie, why do you

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never take me in the Cathedral? You should, as I look like little Jesus.'



This morning Mummie is playing the piano. How slowly she plays. It is sad. Her fingers are white. Her hands are dimpled.

Shall I ask her 'What is a little Jew?' No. I daren't. When she plays the piano, I know she is thinking of Daddie, out there. . . .

Not this morning. Some other time!



Why did that priest-man say, 'What a pity!'?

§ 2

I used to play in the garden or Notre Dame, with my little friend Mariette, who lives in the Rue Chanoinesse.

She was the market gardener, who brings her tidy bunches of carrots to market; and I was the market gardener's horse.

She was the Red Cross nurse, in charge of an ambulance for the very-badly-wounded; and I was the Red Cross nurse's horse.

She was a countess, going to sing patriotic songs to the boys in the trenches; and I was the countess's horse.

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It often vexed me. Why should I always wear harness and bells, and why should she always carry the whip? Why?

'You must be the horse, because you are a boy.'

'But a boy can very well be a coachman and a girl his horse!'

'No. You are the horse. If you won't be the horse, I shan't play.'

We used to play too, at being husband and wife. Madame had a headache; Monsieur must run for the aspirin. Madame was expecting company for dinner; Monsieur had to go down to the cellar for bottles of wine. Madame dismissed her maid, and Monsieur had to clean the shoes.

In the long run I felt furious!

'Why should the husband always obey?'

'Because the wife always gives the orders.'



Oh! the fat man in the black robe is going by! Father What-a-pity! He is not smiling to-day. His lips move as he reads from a small book which he holds with both his hands.

He saw me! I'm sure he saw me.

Then why did he pretend he had not seen me? Perhaps because I am a little . . .

'I say, Mariette, do you know what a little Jew is?'

'A little Jew? No, I don't know. Something rather

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bad, I should say. I'll ask Mummie if you like. She explains everything to me.'



'Well . . . did your mother tell you what it is?'

'What?'

'A little Jew?'

'Oh yes. A little Jew is a very, very unhappy child.'

'Why?'

'Because at Christmas . . . You know on Christmas Eve how we put our slippers in the fireplace before we go to bed, don't you? And the Infant Jesus comes down the chimney at midnight, doesn't he? And he fills the slippers with presents, doesn't he? . . . Well . . . he brings no presents to little Jews.'

'Why?'

'Because they are punished by the Infant Jesus.'

'And why does he punish little Jews?'

'Because . . . Mummie says we must be awfully sorry for them: they are punished, and they are very, very unhappy.'



And I thought:

Am I punished? Neither Nannie nor Mummie ever punish me. So why should little Jesus punish me? Everybody in the streets says I look like him. Then why should he punish me? What have I done to him? I

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don't know him. I have never even seen him. And I am not at all unhappy!

So perhaps I am not a little Jew!

But Nannie said it; Nannie must know.

Perhaps Mariette is making a mistake: little Jews are not punished—little Jews are not unhappy. . . .

But the jolly, fat man in the black robe looked so distressed when Nannie told him. And he did say, 'What a pity!'

Why should he have said, 'What a pity!'?

§ 3

'I'll take you there this afternoon, as it is Christmas Eve. But you mustn't tell Mummie. Do you promise?'

Yes, I promise. . . . Shall I see the Infant Jesus?'

'You'll see the Infant Jesus.'

So Nannie and I went inside the big church.

At first I could see nothing, just darkness, and then lots and lots of lights.

'Look: there he is, lying in the straw.'

'That little naked baby, lying near the cow and the donkey?'

'Yes, and there, kneeling before him, that is his mummie.'

'What is she doing?'

'She is saying her prayers.'

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'Her prayers? To her baby? But why?'

Nannie speaks in a low voice, such a low voice. So do I. You feel you don't want to speak loudly in that big church. . . .

'And the old man, with a long beard, is that his daddie?'

'No, his father is in Heaven. He's in Heaven too.'

'But how can he be here, if he is in Heaven?'

'He is everywhere.'

'But God is everywhere. You told me so!'

'The Almighty and the Infant Jesus are the same person.'

'The Infant Jesus is Almighty God?'

'Do you see that black man, wearing a crown? And those others, with crowns? Those are the Three Wise Men from the East. They have come from far. They bring him presents as he is God.' . . .

'Oh, Nannie! . . . And that one, nailed to those bars of wood . . . and his blood running out of him?'

'That's him too.'

'Who? God?'

'Yes. Jesus, our sweet Saviour, who died for us on the Cross.'

'But who nailed him up like that?'

'Sinners.'

'Which sinners?'

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'Sinners.'

'And are those sinners punished?'



As we left the big church I found Mariette in the garden.

She said:

'It's Christmas Eve to-night, you know. Will you put your slippers in the fireplace?'

'Yes . . . perhaps.'

What a funny look she gives me. I shall blush! I'd do anything not to blush! I am blushing! I feel myself going red. . . .

'What shall we play at?' says Mariette.

I don't feel like games to-day. I am thinking. . . . How can the Infant Jesus, whom we see, be at the same time God, whom we can't see? . . . And if I look like the Infant Jesus, I must look like God? I? Do I look like God?

And I can hear Mariette cracking her whip and calling out:

'Gee-up, Coco, gee-up! It's too bad! I have six badly wounded men to transport and my horse won't budge!'

And I go on thinking:

. . . He died on a Cross. So the Almighty can die?

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. . . And those sinners, who put nails in him . . . who are they? . . . Little Jews, maybe, as he punishes them. . . .

And Mariette calls out:

‘This is too much of a good thing! My guests have arrived and my husband is in the cellar. Now then, Marcel! Are you never coming? I bet he is drinking my wine!’ . . .

And I go on thinking:

. . . Did I put nails through him? I? Where? When? I should surely remember. . . . No, no! I didn’t put nails through him, I never did. No, I am not a little Jew. . . .

Oh, if I only knew! How can I find out?

§ 4

I did so want to ask Mummie to explain it all that night! . . .

In bed I said to myself:

. . . She never talks to me about God, only Nannie does and makes me say my prayers. Why? I wonder if Mummie is angry with God, because he allows war?

. . . I see her very little. She works in a hospital all day. I am in bed when she comes home, in the evening. She comes and kisses me good-night.

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. . . And Daddie! Do I really know him? I have seen him three times: when he was on leave. He wore a blue helmet. . . . What would Mummie say if she knew I pray for him every night? . . . She mustn't know that I'm frightened, frightened that he won't come back again. . . . I know what is in her mind when there are no letters. . . .

. . . How lovely Mummie is. . . . And she does love me! . . . She wouldn't if I were under punishment, if I had harmed the Infant Jesus, if I were a little Jew. . . .

. . . There, she has just come in . . . I can hear the door!

'Are you asleep, dearie?'

. . . Oh! If I only dared to ask her!

'Are you asleep?'

. . . I daren't . . . I daren't.

She kisses me. She goes gently out of the room. . . . I must know! I must know! . . . Oh! if I were to put my slippers . . .

I got out of bed without turning on the light. It was difficult finding my slippers under the chair, in the dark. . . . And then to find the fireplace. . . . And then to find my bed again. . . .

So I lay down and I waited.

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. . . If I'm not a little Jew, he will come down the chimney with a present for me, at midnight. . . .

What will he bring me? A cinema? That would be fine! Or a thing they call a stamp album, with stamps for the album and a brush and gum for sticking in the stamps. Then I could stick in my stamps, as my cousin René does. . . . Yes, Infant Jesus, a stamp album, please. At midnight, please!

Midnight, how many times must the clocks strike? I often hear the chimes from the big church when I am awake. I must keep awake till midnight. . . . I want to see him when he comes down the chimney. . . . Oh! Those big shadows on the ceiling! I *am* frightened! Perhaps it was naughty to have put my slippers there? . . . What if he were to punish me again? . . . The shadows are moving. . . . Who is it speaking? . . .

'I shall not bring you a cinema. I shall not bring you a stamp album. I shall not bring you anything. You are a little Jew. . . . It was you who nailed me to the Cross!'

. . . No, Mummie, No! . . . I don't want to! No! No! . . .

One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten! . . . The clock strikes ten times. Can that be midnight?

. . . Ah, dear God! Dear God! Send the Infant

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Jesus! Let him put a present in my slipper! Oh, don't let me be a little Jew!

And when I woke up the next morning . . . Nothing in my slipper!

§ 5

How cold it was in the garden that day. The fountain was frozen. When Mariette arrived her cheeks were quite red under her velvet bonnet.

'Well! What did the Infant Jesus put in your slipper?'

'Nothing much.'

She looked at me queerly again! . . . Were there tears in her eyes? Or was it just the cold?

And suddenly she calls out:

'Now then, Mr. Coachman, aren't you going to get up in your box? I am the horse to-day, you know!'

. . . Why is she the horse to-day?

And off she trots, all the bells on the reins a-ringing. And I crack the whip!

Then we play at being married. But how my little wife has changed! Why is she so gentle to-day?

'Are you expecting your friends to tea, my darling? I must run to the confectioner's. What would you like? Éclairs? Creamy meringues? Nothing can be too good for my husband! But you seem tired? Always

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over-worked! You must have a rest, my love! Let's go to Biarritz: I'll go and pack!'

. . . How she spoils me! So, after all, it is not always the wife who gives the orders?

And when it was time to say 'good-bye,' she spoke in a voice I had never heard her use before. She looked straight in my eyes, so sadly, and said:

'My poor Claude! Poor Claude!' . . .

. . . She has guessed! I am sure she has guessed!

'When we grow up, I want to be your wife, you know, your real wife. . . . You are such a poor little thing! . . . Here, take my ring, Claude, poor, poor Claude!'

. . . She has guessed! She has guessed!

And I watched her go. And I trembled. And my fingers held a little silver ring. . . .



MARIETTE was being prepared for her first communion. It was a very serious matter:

‘The most wonderful day of my life, you know!’

But I did not know.

‘The bells will ring, there will be music and lights: a fête for me, as for a queen. Jesus, dear God, how frightened I shall be when I reach the last step, just in front of the altar. . . . And when I have to speak aloud, little me, in that big church, full of people. . . . I shall never dare to!’

‘Will you have to speak?’

‘Of course! To make my vow.’

‘What vow?’

‘The vow that my godfather made in my name, when I was tiny, on my christening day. . . . Now, I must take it myself.’

‘What vow?’

‘To renounce the devil and all his works and pomps.’ His pomps? I didn’t understand.

‘You see, if I make a bad first communion I shall be eternally damned; I shall go straight to Hell. Whereas, if I make a good first communion I shall live with the angels. So I must prepare myself.’

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'How do you prepare yourself?'

'I have my confessor to help me. I make an examination of conscience. Yes, when I am in bed, before I go to sleep, I ask myself: "What sins have you committed to-day? What good have you done?" And I note down my defeats and victories.'

'What victories?'

'Victories over my worst mortal sin.'

'Do you commit mortal sin?'

'All my sins are mortal. Pride, to start with: I always want to be leader. And then, gluttony: I always pick out the bruised apples. And then, impurity: I love my bath too much, specially when it is hot. And I've read forbidden books, you know!'

'Forbidden books?'

'The New Testament, in French! It was in Daddie's library. . . . Children are forbidden to read it. I read it all the same! ' . . .



When I was in bed at night I thought about it. . . . A confessor! Someone who speaks to her about herself! How lucky she is! . . . I get told: 'Hold your fork properly.' . . . 'Don't waste your bread.' . . . 'Think about poor hungry children.' . . . 'Never tell lies; men don't lie!' . . . But who helps me to think things over?

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Her mortal sin. . . . And mine? . . . Which is my mortal sin? . . . Oh, I know! But I don't know what to call it!

I am always afraid the word 'Jew' will be used before me: that's it . . . that's my mortal sin! No one uses that word when I'm there, yet I am always afraid of hearing it. . . . The boys during recreation . . . and during the holidays, in hotels, when I play with children who don't know me: all the time, I feel they are thinking of it! . . . How can I rid myself of that fault? I have tried, but I can't manage it! . . .

A 'Jew'! What is it? I know no more about it than when I was five.

Jews and Hebrews are one and the same, it appears. . . . When I was in the sixth, there was a chapter about the Hebrews in my History-book, but it was much shorter than that dealing with the Egyptians and the Assyrians. . . .

The Hebrews were quite a small tribe. They wandered about with their herds and lived in tents. They were slaves in Egypt. Moses led them across the Red Sea. And their patriarchs made a covenant with God! . . . A covenant with God! . . . And they considered themselves the chosen people! . . .

They had kings too: Solomon succeeded David about

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973 B.C. and built the Temple, where burnt sacrifices were made. Within the Temple stood seven-branched candlesticks. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, set fire to the Temple and led the Hebrews captive to Babylon.

And they had prophets too, who said the other gods were false gods, and that their God was the true God, creator of Heaven and earth. And their prophets foretold that one day the Messiah would deliver them and establish the reign of justice on earth. . . .

Where are they, these Hebrews? What have I to do with them? . . .

Israel, God's people! . . .

On my way home from school I stop in front of the news-stall at the corner of the bridge. Every day there is an open newspaper propped up against the window-pane, and I read: 'The Jews and Bolshevism.' . . . 'America delivered up to the Jews.' . . . 'France betrayed by the Jews.' . . .

So Daddie, who volunteered; who in spite of the doctors has returned to the Front, with a bullet in his lung and his shattered ribs . . . he has betrayed France?

What are these Hebrews? What are these Jews?

§ 2

I was leaning over the railing of the bridge. I was watching the water. I was still thinking of my Jews and Hebrews. Someone behind me whistles a jolly tune which I don't know. I turn round. It is Marnier, who says to me:

'What are you up to, day-dreaming there? You are for ever day-dreaming. Oh! I see you quite well, during "rec," alone in your corner. It would be better for you to come with us.'

'Who, you?'

'The Scouts. We have no end of fun and it keeps us fit. Walking, running, jumping. We do our own cooking and sew on our buttons. We live under canvas, just like explorers.'

'Well, I ride, I swim a bit; that's enough for me.'

'Because you are top of the form? It's all very well being top of the form, but you want to know how to get yourself out of tight corners in life, old man. For instance . . . do you live in this district?'

'Yes, in that house there, at the corner of the quay.'

'Right! Now then . . . how many chemists are there in the neighbourhood?'

'There is one in the Rue St. Louis en l'Île.'

'Besides that?'

'Besides . . .'

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'You know only one! That's not much! And the fire stations? You don't know? If you were a Scout, old man, you would know! . . . We make ourselves useful. Help those in distress. We are the knights of to-day. You ought to come to have a look one Sunday. I should be proud to have you in our patrol. Will you come? Don't say no. Leave it open. Think it over. We'll talk it over some other time, old man, won't we?'

And he shakes my hand. And he smiles; all dimples. And off he goes, whistling. . . .

Be a Scout? That's not for me: I think about the Hebrews!

§ 3

Every afternoon, towards half-past four, Mariette went to Notre Dame, to 'visit' the Blessed Sacrament. On my way home from school I waited at the door. We strolled in the garden, then I took her to her house, close by, in the Rue Chanoinesse. It was soon over.

On coming out of church, Mariette seemed worried! She said:

'I prayed badly to-day.'

Or:

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'My thoughts wandered. I didn't feel His presence. . . . Because, He is there, you know, in the Tabernacle on the altar. . . . He is there, just as He was in the midst of the apostles; as He was with the Blessed Virgin and Mary Magdalene. . . . Oh! if I could feel just once that He is there, without thinking of anything else in the world: I should go straight to the Kingdom of Heaven, you know.'

I didn't know.



One day Mariette comes out; I am waiting at the door. I run up to her. . . . What is the matter? Doesn't she see me? . . . She looks elsewhere. Doesn't she want to know me any more? She has gone? Why? What have I done to her?

Oh! the long sharp pain going through my heart! And my body feels like stone, like St. Denis, with his head cut off, up there, over the porch! . . .

And I remembered that bygone Christmas: 'Little Jews are punished . . . little Jews are unhappy.' . . .

I did not wait for her for two days. The third day it was more than I could bear. . . . I went back.

I am on the look-out for her. I tremble. She is there? Will she come?

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. . . Here she is. . . . She has seen me! What will she do?

The old blind woman holds out her hand. Mariette puts a sou in the wooden bowl.

. . . And I? I too would put out my hand! . . .

Not a glance! On she goes! She has gone!

My work was bad throughout that week. For the first time in my life I had 'two' for recitation. Mummie could not understand why. I could not sleep.

I took good care not to pass in front of Notre Dame on my way home from school. But my feet lagged as I went through the garden at the back. . . . Who knows? Perhaps I shall meet her in spite of myself!

And one day, at the very end of the week . . . I had sat down on one of the seats; my Greek grammar open on my knees. I told myself I was learning the first declension. . . . Someone is there. . . . I look up: Mariette! . . .

'I hurt you, Claude dear? I couldn't help it. I thought too much of you in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, so I had to do penance!'

Another time she said to me mysteriously:

'Wait for me to-morrow at the corner of the Island, you know where.' . . .

Our favourite place was at the point, where the

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Island juts out towards the Louvre and the Pont Neuf, there, where the trees droop over the water.

I waited. The sky was red.

. . . What had she to tell me?

And I thought of the days to come, when we would be married. I still had her silver ring. It had become too small for my finger. I took it from my pocket to look at it. And as I sat on the low wall beside the river I thought:

. . . I shall write books. I'll dictate them, as Uncle Jacques does, but instead of a typist, she will take them down. . . . We shall travel; we shall go to see the Great Sachem, on the banks of the Mississippi, as Chateaubriand did. . . . And we'll have a house by the sea where poor children can spend their holidays.

I dreamed of all kinds of things. Suddenly I feel a hand on mine.

How Mariette must have been crying!

'My poor little Claude, poor dear Claude! A terrible thing has happened to us! . . . My confessor . . . my confessor told me . . .'

She could hardly breathe; her cheeks are quivering.

'It seems that a Christian girl and a . . . and a' . . .

'A Jewish boy?'

' . . . Yes . . . a Jewish boy and a Christian girl can never marry! It is forbidden!'

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Her arms are round me. . . . She is crying, she is crying!

§ 4

I had said to myself:

. . . I will know what they think about it. Father will smile his funny little smile; that can't be helped. I shall put the question during lunch.

But a Cabinet Minister was Father's guest, so I lunched alone, in my room.

. . . Well then, this evening, after the soup!

After the soup, Father explained to Mother the working of his wireless telephone. How can I interrupt?

. . . Well then, when Justin is serving the asparagus!

Justin serves the asparagus! Mother tells Father about her Stravinsky quartet . . . Stravinsky is sacred! What am I to do?

Fortunately, during dessert my luck turns. The word 'marriage' came up on its own.

'She is a young Kahn,' says Mother.

'Are there still some left?' says Father.

'Jacques made her acquaintance at Vittel,' says Mother.

'I thought the cure less dangerous!' says Father.

'But one thing will displease you, my dear; they

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will be married in synagogue! The Kahn grandfather insists.'

'The eternal grandfather!'

'My brother gave in, you can understand . . .'

'Just like him!'

'You will be a page, Claude.'

And Mother looks at me so sweetly.

'You must look very nice.'

Then suddenly I speak! I am surprised at hearing myself; my voice sounds unfamiliar.

'Mother, is it true that Jews cannot marry Christians?'

'Who told you that?' says Father.

'A friend.'

'Well, you will do me the favour of informing your friend: to begin with, one does not say Jew, but Israelite; and then, that we are no longer living in the Middle Ages!'

'Ah! During the Middle Ages one could not, and now one can?'

'One can, my little man, one can, and one should. Remember this, Claude, remember this all your life: there are no more Jews, there are no more Christians . . . there are men!'

And lying in my bed I said to myself:

. . . She could . . . we could! It is she who does not want to! . . . Because I am a little Jew, yes, I

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know. . . . I shall never see her again, never! . . . I shall punish myself if I even think of her!



How hard I worked all that week! Three written examinations: first in history, first in French, first in Latin! . . . I did not go past the church . . . I did not go through the garden . . . I scurried home without looking up. . . . No! I don't want to see her! No, I don't want to see her! . . . I have thought of her: a punishment!

My punishment was the working out of a problem. I used often to be plucked in 'maths.' . . . Ah! I improved in 'maths' at that time!

I shall never see her again! Never again!

§ 5

Marnier tackled me again.

'What are you thinking of in your corner?'

'And you? When you are alone, what do you think about?'

'It just depends. In the street I look at the people; their faces, their ways of walking; or whether there are bits of orange-peel on the ground, or watches, or purses. You never know. Then I count the turnings,

gauge the width of the pavement, the height of the houses; I note landmarks. Indoors it is another matter. I try to recollect which shops I passed, what was in the windows. Or I wonder what I should do if the next-door house were on fire, or if there were a burglar on the roof. Or, I organise our next outing: next Sunday I'll have to know how to send out a Morse message, sixteen letters to the minute; pluck a fowl; cook it, and find the North without a compass. Ah! my lad, you have to sweat before you can be a first-class Scout!'

Strange! It is as though Marnier directs his thoughts outwards, and I mine inwards! He does not even know whether he feels or not. And I, I know what I feel even before I feel it. . . .

Is it because I am a Jew?

§ 6

One day the concierge says in his slow way and just for a joke, very respectfully:

'A parcel for you, Master Claude.'

. . . A parcel? For me? At once I think: it is from her!

'I was instructed to give it to Master Claude myself.' . . .

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. . . It is from her! It is from her! I won't open it!
' So I'm giving it to Master Claude myself! '

Quick, the parcel in my satchel! Without waiting for the lift I run upstairs, two at a time. I ring. I am in my room. The parcel is on my table. I finger the string. . . .

. . . I won't open it! . . . I will not open it! . . .
And I open it!

First, a letter falls out:

MY DEAR CLAUDE,

I told you it is forbidden. But since, I have learned something else; it seems that those who are not Christians can become Christians. And then it is allowed.

I kiss you.

MARIETTE.

And with the letter a very small book.

I read the title:

THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. ACCORD-
ING TO SAINT MATTHEW.

Always Jesus!

§ 7

I have read Saint Matthew. . . . So this is Jesus, of whom I knew nothing! How dearly I should have loved him had I known him! When he said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me,' I should have hurried to his side, to follow him, the fishermen, the coarse-handed peasants, and the sad-eyed women who went with him!

What was Galilee like? And Tiberias and Capernaum? And that sea, into which Andrew and Simon cast their nets? And the Jordan, where, in his camel's-hair shirt and leather girdle, John baptised? What long roads through the desert of Judea and on the mountain and the plains of Samaria! . . . How poor the disciples were! And he, too, was poor and vagabond! 'Neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, neither scrip nor yet staves!' 'For the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head!'

A halt is called at the gates of the city. One of the twelve goes to beg for a little food. They seat themselves by the roadside. They eat some fish and a morsel of bread. . . .

An old woman, snowy with leprosy, draws near:

by Edmond Fleg

she kneels before him, she bends down and kisses the hem of his robe. And behold! She arises clean and glowing with health!

Or again, it is a blind man, groping in darkness. Jesus touches the bloodshot eyes, which receive light and glisten with tears!

The paralytic springs from his sick-bed and is able to run! The heart of the shrouded corpse beats anew, the breath of life returns to the already rotting lungs! . . .

Did he really perform all these miracles? What if they were but charming tales, like those about Jupiter or Venus in my mythology book?

'The Gospel according to Saint Matthew'! . . . Was he perhaps that Matthew whom Jesus saw, 'sitting at the receipt of custom'? 'He said unto him: Follow me. And he arose and followed him.'

So he lived at Jesus' side! He heard his voice! He listened to him! He ate with him! He held his hand! What he relates he witnessed! It is all so simple, so clear, in his narrative. Could he have lied? One wants to believe it all! . . .

And after all what does it matter? I should have loved Jesus without his miracles! When he said: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might!' When he said:

'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!' Had he need of miracles? And when he said: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed art the meek; blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness!' . . . And when he said: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.' Or again: '. . . Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also!' . . .

How I wish I could have been there, to hear Jesus' sweet voice! How I should have loved you had I known you!

§ 8

I read further. . . . But I'm frightened of reading! . . . I know too well how the beautiful story finishes! I see that Cross at the end! I am frightened of seeing that Cross!

The Scribes and the Pharisees! They hated him! Yet he was Jewish even as they! It is true he was a Jew like them! Jesus a Jew, like me! . . .

Ah, those Pharisees, with their round shoulders and their shifty eyes! They raise their voices so that all may know that they pray. They are of sad countenance so that all may know that they fast. When they give alms they trumpet it abroad. And they erect booths

by Edmond Fleg

in the Temple. They drink the sweat of the poor. They eat the orphan's bread!

How could they but hate him who is so pure? He comes to save them from sin. He teaches forgiveness and love. But in their wickedness they can understand but one thing: 'An eye for an eye!' 'A tooth for a tooth!'

I can hear them, I can hear them muttering behind closed doors: 'He eats with publicans! He converses with Samaritans. He drives out demons with the aid of Beelzebub! He plucks corn on the Sabbath! He says that in three days he can destroy and rebuild the Temple! He says he can, with one word, blot out all the sins of the world! He says . . . he says . . .'

And the rich, the priest and the elders, they plot together. They plot, head to head, shifty eyes blinking: 'Let us ask him if we must pay tribute to Cæsar; if he says "No," he is lost.' . . . 'Let us bribe someone to betray him.' . . . 'Let us buy false witnesses; they are to be had for next to nothing! . . .'

Hypocrites! Murderers! I am there! I hear you!

My God, my God! What will they do to him?

§ 9

. . . No, I don't want to know. I won't read what follows! If I can't get to sleep I shall stick in the

The Boy Prophet

stamps which Mother gave me on Sunday; three envelopes full. I will not read further . . . I will not! . . . I shall get up and I shall stick in stamps! . . .

I got up. I dressed. I emptied the envelopes on to the table.

What a number of stamps there are! It will take hours just to sort them and classify them in alphabetical order!

I take my little tweezers and I start.

. . . Mozambique . . . Bolivia . . . Seychelles . . .
Ireland . . .

Hello! A Liberian, with an elephant! I had one with a monkey and one with a boat, but none with an elephant. . . .

And the orange-and-black Shah of Persia I was wanting! Splendid! My Persian page will be complete! Oh, I must stick in that one at once! . . .

. . . Really, stamps are fun! I remember when I was five . . . Christmas Eve. . . . Who was it I asked for an album? The Infant Jesus. . . . He didn't give me one. . . . And now I have one! And I stick in stamps so as to forget Jesus!

. . . Transvaal . . . Roumania . . . Denmark . . .
Borneo . . .

by Edmond Fleg

Mother did buy well. There are some real beauties. A Honduras, with a steaming engine . . . a Cashmire, which looks like an old coin. . . .

. . . Selangor!

Where is that, Selangor? . . . And Zelaya, where is that? And Trengganu? . . .

How big the world is! How small I am in this great big world! . . . And Jesus! . . .

. . . Victoria . . . Ethiopia . . . Togo . . .

Togo! . . . Do people in Togo think of Jesus? And the Laplanders . . . and the Hindoos. . . . Do they think of Jesus?

Then why should I think of Jesus, I, a little Jew?

§ 10

All the same, I read to the end! . . . I am ashamed! My God, my God, why did you give me life if I must always feel this shame? . . . The kiss of Judas! I had heard of the Kiss of Judas; now I know what it means!

For thirty deniers he was betrayed! For thirty pieces of silver! . . . What were the rest about during that time?

The Boy Prophet

Jesus says to them: 'One of you shall betray me.'
And they sleep!

The garden is dark. Jesus prays, weeps. They sleep!

Here come the soldiers, with flaming torches. Here is the traitor; his kiss! They sleep!

I am only a child, but I should not have slept!

There is but one who tries to defend him. Jesus says to him: 'All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.' And he withdraws immediately! Well, perish by the sword, but strike! I am only a child, but I know I should have struck!

He is led before Caiaphas; he is taken before Pilate. And where are the disciples?

Peter is in the courtyard. Three times he repeats: 'Jesus? I know not the man!'

And you, John, where are you? And you, Luke? And you, Mark, James, Matthew?

No disciples!

And he had chosen the best amongst the Jews to preach his word! . . . You should have chosen children, Jesus, children like me! You would never have been abandoned by us!

And the rest of the Jews! All the other Jews!

He is tied to a pillar. How they tighten the rope!

by Edmond Fleg

Oh, the spitting lips, the menacing hands! And the lash! . . . You preached mercy? Ply the lash about his shoulders! . . . You preached forgiveness? Ply the lash to his breast! . . . You preached love? The lash to his face! . . . All over his body, the lash leaves its crimson weals!

And now he must carry the Cross on his back, like a thief, between two thieves! . . . How heavy it is! How big! . . . It rises above his head, it stretches beyond his shoulders on either side, and it scrapes along the road behind his feet. . . . His knees give way; his back is taut; his head falls forward: he crawls beneath the Cross!

And the whole town is up, yelling at his heels! Thousands of raised hairy fists! The distorted faces! The laughter, the hissing: 'Come, son of David! Show us your majesty! Give voice to your harp! Dance before the ark! Show us how well you dance!'

Beasts! Do you not see his pale mother yonder? She tries to follow him, but she falls with each step she takes! . . .

Now they maul him! They dare touch him with their dirty hands! They rend his clothes. They strip him before the crowd. Stripped! Poor Jesus! . . . They kick him to the ground, on to the Cross. They

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strain at his legs, they strain at his arms, they strain at his head. . . .

And those long nails! The sound of the hammers on those nails! Those nails, which grate as they enter the bone! . . .

Oh! The Cross is up! The Cross is still bigger! . . .

Jesus, my Jesus! What have they done to you? Blood on your ankles, blood on your wrists, blood on your brow! And your eyes, your eyes! . . . You look at your tormentors? They are playing at dice! And they laugh; they mock you:

‘Come down from the Cross, you who can do everything! Save yourself, you who save others! Let God deliver you, Son of God!’

And your reply:

‘Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do!’

What did you there, Jews? You could have saved him; Pilate offered him to you, but you preferred Barabbas! And you yelled:

‘That his blood be on us and on our children!’

So it is on me too! I am your child! Then I curse you, Jews! You are cursed by your child! . . .

by Edmond Fleg

What can I do now? How can I live? Where can I hide?

His blood is on me! How can I hide his blood?

§ 11

Then Marnier does not see the blood on me? He is always so nice. He wants me to join the Scouts.

'You'll see what fun it is: we are all like brothers.'

'So you make no difference between Christians . . . and others?'

'No difference? What difference? I, well I'm a Protestant. You, your name is Levy. What on earth is that to do with me? As long as we are decent chaps! . . . You will come? I really want you to. Firstly, because you are such a good sort. And then, in order to become a "first-class" Scout, I must bring a recruit, and you are my choice. I'll teach you lots of things! Knotting, for instance. D'you think it's easy? Bless you, old man; the number of knots there are to learn! The fisherman's knot, for tying ropes of different thickness, and the knot for shortening a rope, and the knot for attaching a rope to a picket, and the slip-knot, if someone has to be let down from a window. There are times when a well-tied knot can save a man's life. And then I'll teach you how to light a fire in the open; pitch a tent, make a camp candlestick, carve a collar-stud from a piece of wood. Lots and lots of things, I tell

you. And the Scout's salute and the Scout's song and the Scout's law; the Scout law is splendid! You have to promise to do at least one good deed a day. You will see how ripping it is! You will come, old man, say you'll come!'

I must give it a try! I can't spend all my time sticking in stamps!

§ 12

Once again Mother has made the remark:

'Why do you look so unhappy, Claude dear? There must be something the matter with the child!'

'He is developing,' says Father.

. . . Oh, yes, developing!

'No, no,' says Mother, 'there is something amiss. He needs more amusement. . . . Has anything at school hurt you? Tell me . . . answer!'

'No, really, Mother, I assure you.'

'And why do you get home so late? . . . We were just sitting down to table.'

'I was talking to a friend. He wants me to join the Scouts.'

'That is a good idea,' says Father.

by Edmond Fleg

'Where did you both go?'

'Nowhere . . . we talked.' . . .

. . . Where I went, Mother! . . . If you only knew!

I go there every day now. I have to go there! I don't want to meet Mariette, in the evening, before the Blessed Sacrament; so I go there in the mornings on my way home from school. . . . And sometimes, in spite of myself, I stay on . . . I stay on, I lose all count of time.

Quite near the door stands a nun; there are white wings on her head. She proffers the holy water, with her finger. . . . What would I give to be able to take it, as others do? And as they make the sign of the Cross? . . . From the left to the right; from the forehead to the heart, the Cross! . . .

I dare not! Why? Is it only from shame? Or is it from fear? . . . Fear of what?

I go in slowly. I avoid the candle-lit chapels, where a priest drones to the sound of a bell, swung by a child, a child like me! . . . I avoid the vast, empty space, bright with the light from the rose-windows! I hide beside a pillar, in darkness, in silence. . . .

Oh, how I crave to kneel! Who restrains me? Who calls to me: 'No!'

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The lofty arches are full of the prayers they have heard. The prayers of centuries, they are there! I can feel them. When I shut my eyes I think I see them!

To pray! To pray too! To mingle my prayers with those prayers!



I am attracted to one spot: the confessional!

The drawn curtains. . . . What is behind that curtain? . . . The church is almost empty. . . . No one can see me. . . . If I were to look?

I lifted the curtain gently.

. . . Of whom am I afraid? I am betraying no one! There, doubtless, sits the priest. . . . And on the other side? Does one kneel when at confession? . . .

There is a small wooden grating in the partition. One must speak very softly, I should think, with one's lips close to the grating. . . . And on the other side a listening ear. . . .

How I long to tell all, all, to a face that I cannot see! . . .

And I went behind the curtain. I put my lips close to the grating. . . .

How does one address a priest at confession? . . . What have I to confess?

by Edmond Fleg

'I am a little Jew, a poor little Jew!'

§ 13

Yesterday I ventured near a chapel in which I had seen kneeling figures from afar.

Here is the priest in his great golden mantle, advancing to the altar, followed by a child clad in crimson and white.

He halts. He bows. He strikes his breast. What is he doing? . . . Is he confessing sins?

Now he mounts the steps. He kisses the stone; he kisses the lace cloth; he turns the pages of a book and murmurs. . . .

Now he is almost singing. I hear words: 'Gloria . . . Gloria.' . . .

Who is beside me? I feel a hand brush against mine. A hushed voice says:

'I knew you would come, Claude dear!'

It is Mariette! She is kneeling on the stone floor. The bell rings. The priest makes the sign of the Cross on the book, on his forehead, on his lips, on his heart. And, at my side, Mariette, in low tones, is reading her prayer. I can read it from over her shoulder:

'I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of

The Boy Prophet

heaven and earth . . . and in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father . . .
God of God, Light of Light' . . .

She is kneeling. Shall I kneel?

And she continues, a little louder, doubtless, so that
I may hear:

'True God of true God . . . who for us men and
for our salvation came down from heaven, and was
incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and
was made man. He was crucified for us' . . .

And I am still standing. I tremble; I would like to
run away. I can see nothing . . . I can hear nothing.
. . . What is happening?

The bell tinkles. All heads are bowed as if a great
wind were blowing. . . .

And Mariette whispers, in anguish:

'Now, Claude, now! The Chalice! . . . The Host!'
. . .

. . . What is the Chalice? That goblet? And the
Host? That little white thing?

The priest stretches out his arms, like Jesus on the
Cross. He takes the Host. He takes the Chalice. He
raises them towards Heaven. I hear Latin words:

'Ecce corpus . . . Ecce sanguis . . .'

And Mariette continues:

by Edmond Fleg

'Incarnate word Divine Jesus, true God, true man. I believe that thou art really present in this Blessed Sacrament. I adore thy precious blood, which thou hast shed for all men.' . . .

Where am I? . . . The lights, the crimson-and-white child, the bowed heads, all go whirling round me. . . . My legs are shaking. The arches are descending. . . . Will they crush me? . . .

I know nothing . . . I understand nothing! . . .

'He is there? In the Host?'

'Yes, Claude. He is there. Look, the priest is communicating: he eats the flesh of Jesus, he drinks the blood of Jesus. . . . At every mass Jesus dies anew, crucified to save us . . . to save you, Claude dear! . . . Ah! when shall I too be able to receive him? . . . God in me! . . . And you too, Claude, when?' . . .

And she takes a picture from between the leaves of her little book; she slips it in my hand. . . . Again she makes the sign of the Cross. . . . And I am alone, alone before the snuffed candles.

What is this God which is eaten? What is this God which is drunk?

§ 14

I have seen the Scouts!

How proud they are of their scarves, their khaki

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shirts, their star-covered sleeves. They take saluting, secret signs, badges, very seriously!

And their nicknames: Akela, Kaa, White Fox, Silent Deer!

And their games! The Poisoned Circle, for instance: a circle is traced on the ground. All hold hands around it, everyone pushes as hard as he can, and he who gets into the poisoned circle is lost! How funny it is!

And the game of Ambassadors! And Smugglers! And the Man Hunt and the Treasure Hunt! . . .

Mother maintains my thoughts are in advance of my age! . . .

At my age Mozart composed sonatas. Pascal invented geometry! . . . I am neither Mozart nor Pascal—not yet! . . . I don't even know how to string two ideas together! . . .

Nevertheless, if to be my age means I have to play at being wounded, at Red Indians, or imitating animal calls, then it is quite true, Mother, I am not my age!

§ 15

The picture she gave me is of Jesus, but not the crucified, suffering Jesus. No, quite another Jesus, a white-robed one, happy and smiling under his halo, his arms outspread, and who says:

'Suffer the little children to come unto me.'

by Edmond Fleg

. . . Oh yes, Jesus! Suffer me to come to you,
like a little child!

I hung the picture above my bed, to the right, close
to my pillow. And if I only turn on my side I can
see it, by the light coming in from the street; my eyes
almost touch it. I see it, and I am so near to his face
that his face grows, grows, his cheeks next to mine. . . .
And I feel he smiles, he breathes. . . . And I whisper
to him:

. . . Yes, sweet Jesus, as if I were your little child!
Take your little child in your arms! I love you, gentle
Jesus! I love those who love you, and those who hated
you I hate. And I am ashamed and hurt, hurt by all
they did to you! . . .

But tell me, sweet Jesus, tell me softly: is it true that
you are in the Host? . . . How can you be in the
Host?

. . . Son of Man . . . You called yourself the Son
of Man. Then, why Son of God? I too, Jesus, I am
the son of God. . . . All the sons of man are the sons
of God! . . . And you said too:

‘I am he who was promised, the Messiah, for whom
you are waiting . . . and I am God.’ . . .

. . . Man and God at the same time! Is it possible?
They did not believe it. . . . And I, I cannot believe
it either . . . I cannot! Forgive me, gentle Jesus, I
cannot believe it! . . .

And if the Law was:

. . . Death to him who calls himself God? . . .

The Law is the Law! Just when unjust! . . . Socrates, you know, Socrates, who was another Jesus . . . he might have fled. I read about him in my History-book. He did not want to flee. He chose to die on account of the Law!

. . . And you too, gentle Jesus, you said, according to the Gospel:

'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law.'

Should they then have destroyed the Law on your behalf?

. . . What? What is your answer? . . . That you believed yourself to be God! . . . That God is above the Law!

But what if you were mistaken, sweet Jesus? If you were not God!

§ 16

I should like to be quite alone in the big church.

I would go one evening at dusk. I should hide in the confessional. I should hear the sacristan go by with his heavy keys. Oh, how I should tremble when he passed close to me!

. . . There he goes. . . . He has gone. . . . He

by Edmond Fleg

does not know that someone is there. . . . He shuts the doors. The keys grate in the locks. . . .

. . . I am alone in the church. . . . The clock, overhead, strikes six . . . eight. . . . Mother is asking:

‘Where is the child? Has he not come home yet?’

. . . Nine . . . ten . . .

I am alone. My mind is a blank. . . . Dare I kneel now that I am alone?

No . . . I dare not!

Who prevents me? Who forbids it?

Shall I go to the stoup? Dip my fingers in the holy water?

No . . . I dare not. . . . Still, I dare not!

Shall I go up through the darkness as far as the gilded altar glittering in the light of the big candles? . . . Open the little door? . . . See the Host? . . . Touch the Host? . . .

. . . Is He present in the Host?

Ask him:

‘Jesus, are you there?’

§ 17

Mariette has taken communion to-day.

How full the church was. I went up into the rostrum, at the rear of the high altar, so as to see the ceremony from above.

The blast of the organ . . . what a hurricane! . . .

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And the long shafts of light, red and gold and blue,
sliding down into the shadows. . . .

Candles, a forest of candles! . . . On a throne sits
an old man in red robes; his red hat is placed on his
head; his red hat is removed from his head. . . . His
big book is opened for him; his big book is closed for
him.

A procession of golden priests approaches. They
kneel, they rise. They go to the right, they go to the
left: it is like a dance. . . .

Children sing as they swing smouldering perfumes.
. . .

She is there, in the first row, the fourth to the right
. . . her dress is white beneath her white veil.

The other day, in the big church, she said, with all
the strength of her little voice:

'I renounce Satan and all his works and his pomps,
and I espouse Jesus Christ for ever.'

And now, here she is, by the altar rail. She kneels,
she spreads the cloth over her hands. She holds her
head high. . . . She puts out the tip of her tongue:
the priest is holding the Host! . . .

The Host is in her mouth! The Host is in her body!
She has raised her eyes. Towards me? Towards
God?

I ran to see her close to, in the crowd. She had felt
that I was present, she was looking for me.

by Edmond Fleg

. . . How beautiful she is! For the first time I see that Mariette is beautiful! Her eyes have suddenly grown so big!

'If you only knew, Claude! If you only knew! . . . God is within me! When will he be in you?'

§ 18

I have hurt Marnier's feelings because I can get no fun out of his Scouts. . . . He maintains I haven't understood anything; that it is serious below the surface and that I should surely like their 'Initiation.'

For, according to him, the 'Initiation' is something like a First Communion!

I should like to see it!

§ 19

On going to bed I replaced the picture, and as I was falling asleep I said to it:

'So that's what it means to believe in you, Jesus? Believe that your flesh is eaten? Believe that your blood is drunk?'

'I cursed myself because they crucified you, crying: "His blood be on us and on our children." And you would that I eat your flesh, that I drink your blood?'

"For the salvation of the world," you said. "To

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wash away the sins of the world." You are God, and you need blood to forgive man?

'Then why are they accursed, those who shed your blood, gentle Jesus?'

'You said: "The time is at hand, I must die on the Cross in order to fulfill the prophecies." . . . And you wished to die. . . . So, the Jews who put you to death but fulfilled the prophecies. And Judas, in betraying you, saved the world!'

'Why then should your blood be upon us, on Mother, on Father, on me? Why, gentle Jesus, why?'

And his pictured face smiled at me, quite close to my tear-filled eyes. And the white-robed figure stretched out his arms to me, and he said:

'Suffer the little children to come unto me.'

And as I slept I heard him repeat:

'Little children . . . little children . . .'

But towards morning I had a dream. And in my dream it was no smiling face that I saw. Yet again it was the suffering Jesus being led to torture. And there were three people, three special people, in the crowd yelling behind him that I did not know. And yet, in my dream, I somehow felt I knew them!

He was staggering along, burdened with the Cross. At each step a woman struck him. And at each step a man thrust the crown of thorns deeper down on his brow, into his eyes. And at each step a child spat in

by Edmond Fleg

his face, when, for a moment, his face was lifted from the dust. . . .

Now they have reached the calvary. The immense Cross is lying on the black earth. And he, with rent limbs, is lying on the Cross. And the man drives a great nail into his right hand. And the woman drives a great nail into his left hand. And the hammers go down with a thud. And the bones grind. And the child drives a great nail into his ankles. And the bones crack.

And I look on, shuddering. My cheeks stiffen; a great nail goes through my heart.

And each time the child wields the hammer. I feel my arm. . . . Yes, indeed it is my arm which is raised, which delivers the blows!

And from the wounds flow three red streams. And the dying voice murmurs:

'May my blood be upon you and upon your children.'

And I look again. . . . Now I see them; I recognise them:

It is Father, that man driving the nail into his right hand. It is Mother, that woman driving the nail into his left hand. And at his feet, that child, driving in those nails, that child, it is I!

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Then I cried out aloud and my cry woke me. But from above my bed I could still hear the voice:

'Upon you and upon your children.' . . .

Someone was there, on the wall, I could feel someone there!

My fingers fumbled along the wall. . . . What have I touched? . . . A wooden Cross!

My fingers fumbled higher up in the darkness. I knelt up on my pillow . . . I stood up on my bed.

Yes, it is a Cross. And here, here a bleeding foot. . . . And here a leg . . . a knee!

And from above the dying voice repeats:

'Upon you and upon your children.'

Then nothing. Silence. The church clock strikes four.

I could not go to sleep again. I knelt by the window. . . . What is the use of living? Those who cannot believe he is God are accursed. Believe that a man is God! I shall never be able to believe that!

Day breaks. Over there . . . the Pantheon high in the sky . . . the big trees beneath my window . . . a choir of birds . . . Notre Dame . . . the climbing spires rising like prayers. And there is no room for my prayer!

The Seine is a rosy-pink.

by Edmond Fleg

When I was quite small, there was a low house on the bridge. Nannie called it the Morgue.

I asked her:

‘What are all those long black carriages for? And those boxes, with the black covers, they are carrying? What is in them?’

Nannie replied:

‘Nothing! People who have been drowned.’ . . .
Drowned, drowned! . . .

At half-past seven I went downstairs with my satchel under my arm.

Go to school? Learn? What is the good of it, if one is accursed? . . .

Who led me to the point of the Island, there where the trees bend over the river? . . .

Mariette is not there. . . . I too bend over the river for a long, long time. Why?

. . . The depths of the river. The drowned, the drowned, in the depths of the river! . . .

The church clock strikes eight.

Who made me run to the door? Who made me go in?

A priest, all in black, is sitting in the confessional. He has pulled the curtain.

Who urged me on? Who pushed me to my knees,

The Boy Prophet

on the other side of the partition, with my lips close to the wooden grating?

I hear a very gentle voice:

‘What have you done wrong, my child?’

‘Reverend Father, Father, I don’t know what to call you, I have never been to confession. . . . Excuse me, Father, I am not a Christian.’

‘I cannot listen to you here, my child. Come.’

‘No, you must listen to me, Father! . . . If you won’t listen to me, I shall die.’

‘You can speak to me outside.’

‘I wouldn’t dare to. If you could see me I wouldn’t dare to, and I shall die. I want to die, because I am so miserable. . . . I have no religion, Father! I am a little Jew . . . I feel I am accursed. . . . Yet I feel so happy in your church. I should like to be a priest, so that I could stop in your church for ever! . . . And I love your Jesus . . . I love him so dearly . . . I hate those that crucified him. . . . But as for believing he is in the Host, believing that he is God . . . I can’t! So what am I to do, Father? . . . What am I to do?’

And the gentle voice replied:

‘How old are you, my child?’

‘Over fourteen.’

‘Our Lord would not allow us to make you a Christian at your age, little man. When you are older you

by Edmond Fleg

must think it over again and come back then. God will grant you faith if He wishes you to have it.'

'But now, Father, now, how can I live?'

'If our sweet Jesus forgave the Jews; if He has preserved them miraculously, throughout the ages, do you think it is only to punish them? No, no! He is too good, too just for that. He wants them to be, until the world comes to an end. Then He will return, and it will be for them; and they will know Him. And they will be converted, and their conversion will convert all the rest of mankind. . . . You, my child, have already been touched by His Grace, light will doubtless be accorded to you, sooner than to your future brethren. . . . In the meantime, be a Jew, my child, be a Jew!'



. . . BE a Jew. . . . Yes . . . but what must one do to be a Jew?

To be a Christian you must believe that Jesus is in the Host, that he is God. But what must you do to be a Jew?

Mariette made me read the Gospel. . . . I know there is a Jewish gospel; it is called the Old Testament. Father has lots of books! What if I were to have a hunt in his library?

Thursday afternoon, Father was at a committee meeting of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme: Mother had her quartet. I went into the library and I looked for it.

. . . How can I find it amongst so many books? The four walls are stacked with them, from the floor to the ceiling.

Here, on the bottom shelf, all these big volumes? The Encyclopedia . . . Dictionary of Science . . . Universal Geography. . . . No, it isn't on this side.

And over here? Organic Chemistry . . . Telegraphy . . . Optics . . . Cosmography. . . .

And over there? The Primitive Peoples . . . History of France . . . History of England . . . History of Poland . . . History of China. . . .

Edmond Fleg

No history of Israel!

Higher up, on the right, perhaps? Cicero . . . Livy . . . Plutarch . . . Homer. . . .

Or to the left? Shakespeare . . . Balzac . . . Victor Hugo . . . Tolstoy . . . Calderon. . . .

I wheeled the tall ladder all around the room; standing on tip-toe, I scanned the title on each binding.

There were books dealing with the Seas and the Mountains; on Fire and on Water; on Animals and on Vegetables; on Art and on Law; on Philosophy and on Mythology; on Brahminism, Confucianism, Mahomedanism, and Christianity; about Laplanders, Red Indians and Negroes. . . . About Jews: nothing!

And Father is a Jew!



I know someone who could tell me all about it. He is a new boy, in my form. He has a funny sort of name: Styrinovsky.

All the masters made him spell out his name, and they all asked him:

‘Are you Russian?’

Each time he answered as if he were proud of it:

‘No. I am a Palestinian Jew.’

He must know. But I daren’t question him. I feel ashamed.

Why?

§ 2

People sing in Hebrew! People pray in Hebrew: Hebrew still exists! And I did not know that!

Yesterday, Uncle Jacques's wedding; the big synagogue. . . . It is not at all like Notre Dame! . . . Inside it is very light! . . . No paintings . . . no statues . . . no shadows in which to hide. . . . And all these lined-up benches. . . . The men keep on their hats! . . . And no one kneels! . . .

We entered in a procession. What a crowd on either side! Who could have thought there were so many Jews in Paris? . . . How beautiful the singing voices are, and the tones of the organ and the 'cello!

I walked arm-in-arm with the bride's little sister: I was a page. Everybody looked at us.

In the background, steps gay with lights and flowers, and a big crimson canopy, crested with a plume of feathers. And beneath the canopy, that priest, with a shawl over his shoulders! . . .

'That's the rabbi,' the little sister tells me. 'He will bless them.'

We are seated. The rabbi speaks. What can he be saying? I hear nothing.

by Edmond Fleg

Now a collection is being made. I, too, collect! So the Jews too think of the poor? . . .

Here comes Uncle Jacques and his pretty wife; she is draped in a beautiful white shawl. They drink from a goblet. They break a glass; it makes a noise. Why?

'That is part of the religion,' says the little sister.

'Do you know about the religion?'

'I have to on account of Grandfather! He simply pesters Mummie and Daddie: milk and meat; and ham; and the White Fast; and if anyone smokes on Saturday! And Michel's Bris-milah!¹ And Simon's Bar-Mitzvah!'²

'What is that? What?'

'Yes, the Bar-Mitzvah, the first communion.'

They have a first communion!

§ 3

It is true, I was unjust to the Scouts. I thought myself as able as they, just because I know how to ride a horse round the Pantheon riding school and swim in the baths at Claridge's. And I made fun of their signs and banners, and games, just because I am so proud of *thinking*!

¹ BRIS-MILAH (for Berith-milah): circumcision.

² BAR-MITZVAH; confirmation, communion.

The Boy Prophet

And what if they know how to think far better than I do?

Marnier has found a recruit who is worth as much as I! Forgeot. He is getting ready for Initiation. Yesterday I heard him reciting the Scout Law to Marnier:

'The Scout has but one word!

'The Scout is loyal and chivalrous.

'The Scout makes himself useful and does a good deed each day.

'The Scout is a friend to all and a brother to all other Scouts.

'A Scout is courteous and respectful of others' opinions.

'A Scout is kind to animals.

'A Scout knows how to obey!

'A Scout is always good-tempered.

'A Scout is industrious, economical and respectful of other people's property.

'A Scout is clean, in his body, mind, words and deeds.'

Yes! Their Law is good. . . . But, I feel there is something lacking. . . . What can it be?

Ah! how I loved that God on the Cross!

§ 4

When I told Mother I wanted to be Bar-Mitzvah, I had to translate the word! And when I had translated it, she was astonished.

'Where do you get such ideas from, Claude dear? Your father will not be pleased!'

'Ask him for me, Mother, will you? I daren't!'

When we were at table, Mother mentioned the matter as if she were joking. But I think her voice trembled a little!

'Do you know, my dear, what Claude has got into his head since Jacques's wedding?

'He wants to become a rabbi!'

'Not yet. But he wants to be prepared for his. . . . How do you pronounce the word, Claude?' . . .

'My Bar-Mitzvah.'

'What on earth is that?'

'His Jewish first communion.'

'That's something fresh! You wanted to be a Scout. I should have preferred that! In any case you might have asked my opinion!'

'Exactly, Father, I am asking your opinion.'

. . . I felt myself blushing. My chin trembles! Surely I am not going to cry at my age!

'There you are, my dear! This is what comes from

The Boy Prophet

compromise! Your brother sees fit to go back on all our principles. This child is dragged into a synagogue: two notes of music, two words of Hebrew, and there you are, he takes a plunge into mysticism! Anyhow, we'll not show any opposition, it would be the best way to encourage him!'

'Then . . . it is yes, Father?'

Suddenly his severe look melts. His little smile creeps back to the corner of his mouth:

'Yes . . . it is yes, my boy. You will need someone to teach you religion? So be it. I'll write to Grandfather Kahn: he will send us his prize Cohen. I am not afraid: you are intelligent; you will get over your Ghetto nostalgia!'

§ 5

I am invited to Mariette's to-day for the first time.

How different it all is from my home. There are old-time portraits in the drawing-room, and mahogany furniture; the ceiling is low; everything is antique, quiet. A console to the right, a console to the left; an armchair to the left, an armchair to the right; and a table standing exactly in the centre of the carpet.

I knew no one. I felt uncomfortable. There were a number of children; they were all jolly! Mariette introduced me to them. They all seemed surprised when

by Edmond Fleg

they heard my name. . . . I am sure they whispered when my back was turned!

To start with, there was a cinema in the big hall: a journey through Chili; the Miracles at Lourdes, and then Charlie Chaplin.

At tea we all put on the caps we found in the crackers: there was a Breton, a sweep, a nurse, a sailor, Napoleon. . . . Mine was an arch-bishop's: every one laughed a lot.

Later there was dancing. My heart felt crushed. I sat all alone in a corner. Mariette went freely from one to another. She danced and hopped about. She came over to me just for one minute.

'Do you think I'm enjoying myself, Claude? I am sadder than you. Mummie and Daddie want me to be jolly. I've asked them to let me go to a convent boarding school. But, would you believe it, they won't hear of it! They say I am too much of a mystic. Do you know what that means?'

. . . Too much of a mystic! . . . She too!

'They sent for the doctor. They are worried about me. They shook their heads. But I shall go to a convent all the same! I want to spend next summer holidays in one. I simply must!'

And in a low voice she went on:

'I want to pray for you. . . . When will you go to communion, Claude?'

'Which?'

'What do you mean, which?'

'Jews have a religion too, you know; and a communion. I want to take their communion.'

She went quite pale.

Then I told her about my confession and what the kind priest had said.

'I understand, I understand,' she said. 'It is a test. You will come back to us. . . . You will choose Jesus. . . . I shall pray so hard for you!'

A big boy comes up. He dances off with her. She laughs and pirouettes as she goes.

How I wish I could hide my feelings!

§ 6

During recreation Styrinovsky came over to me. He looks one straight in the face. He has tiny eyes and a tiny nose. He has not a foreign accent, just a suspicion of the South in his voice, from time to time, and something trenchant and authoritative in his tone.

He says to me:

'You are a Jew, aren't you?'

'Yes. I am going to prepare my Bar-Mitzvah.'

'What for?'

'To learn . . .'

'To learn what?'

'To be a Jew.'

by Edmond Fleg

'And do you think the rabbis can teach you that?'

'Why not?'

'Jew! It's not a religion! It is a fatherland!'

'What fatherland?'

'Jerusalem . . . Palestine!'

'Palestine? . . . I, I'm French.'

'Then you are no Jew! You are an Israelite!'

. . . Is it pity that I see in his eyes?

'You are a French Israelite!'

'But you then, if you are a Palestinian . . . what are you in France for?'

'My father is here doing propaganda. So do I.'

'What propaganda?'

'All those Israelites who have countries of their own in the world must help us to remake our fatherland.'

. . . What stress he lays on the word 'Israelites'!

'So you want to rebuild the Temple?'

'Which Temple?'

'Solomon's Temple.'

. . . I think he shuts his little eyes. . . .

'We are building schools; we are draining marshes; we are making roads; we are planting vines.'

'And God?'

'God? . . . We don't harm God. We even build synagogues for him. But we've been waiting for over two thousand years for him to give us back Palestine! He may help us if he likes. . . . We aren't waiting for him, though!'

The Boy Prophet

. . . Styrinovsky does not seem to rely much on God!

On my way home from school, I leant over the parapet, near to the Pont St. Louis, and I thought: . . . Palestine still exists?

And I tried to recall the history I had learnt in the sixth: the Egyptians; the Assyrians; Abraham; God's ally, Moses; the Promised Land; the prophets, the Messiah; Nebuchadnezzar; Titus. . . .

. . . Palestine still exists? . . . Jews are cultivating the land there? . . . It is a fatherland.

And I looked around me: the boats swinging round the point of the Island, the big chestnut trees, the Cathedral spires, and high on the skyline, the Pantheon.

And I said to myself:

This is my birthplace. My grandfather's father sold cloth in the Rue Turbigo when Louis Philippe was king. My father's father was one of Gambetta's friends. And for four years my father fought like a hero. . . . Was it so that Palestine should be my fatherland? . . . I have a country; what I need is a God!

§ 7

I wanted to see what their 'Initiation' consists of, as they say it is like a communion service!

They took me with them, for the whole day, on Sunday.

by Edmond Fleg

It is curious. When we went through the villages the children watched us from over the farmyard gates; the peasants looked round, their scythes on their shoulders, and I, who had made such fun of broad-brimmed hats and khaki shirts, I felt uncomfortable at not being dressed like them. Why? . . .

How jolly everything seemed . . . the green of the trees was new to me . . . the water. . . . Was the world new on Sunday or I? . . .

On the edge of the forest they all lay down their knapsacks to build huts. I try to help. I am not too clumsy. First of all you drive in two forked posts, then a crosspiece, by way of a top, and on to that you pile armfuls of branches.

Forgeot has to demonstrate that two matches are enough to light a fire in the open. How well he chooses the spot, which he carefully clears of grass and brambles. Now he starts just a little flame of twigs, on to that he places sticks, pyramid-wise, and, to finish, chumps of wood and logs. I should never have known how to do it!

How spoilt we all are when you come to think of it! I want water; I turn on the tap. I want light: I turn the electric switch. I want warmth; I turn the little wheel on the radiator. And it all seems quite natural

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to me! . . . The Scouts are right! Everyone should know how to do things for themselves!

Now Forgeot has to follow a trail. I go with him. It is easy at first. The tracks of two heavy boots are clearly visible. But now we are at a cross-roads. Oh, all the footprints are mixed up. Where are we to find the tracks of those heavy boots? Forgeot turns to the right, he turns to the left; he goes forwards, then backwards. He stoops down, he counts the holes left by the nails, then he measures the heels and the width of the soles. And I find myself getting interested.

‘This way!’

‘No, over here.’

‘Yes, yes, splendid!’

The trail is found!

But suddenly: big boulders! Not a footprint to be seen. Forgeot looks about him again, all eyes. Crumbs of bread? . . . A dropped match? . . . A bit of stuff torn from the seat of a pair of trousers? Nothing! We are all alone. Where are the others? What silence! I am hungry!

It is no longer a game. We have to get ourselves out of this. Which way did we come? Rocks exactly alike on every side. What is the time? The sun is sinking behind the trees. Shall we have to sleep here? Not that! . . .

But Forgeot knows what to do. He goes haphazard

by Edmond Fleg

through the desert of rocks, then, with our eyes glued to the ground, we go all round it. . . .

‘There! There! On the grass. Tracks of heavy boots.’

It was I who saw them. . . . There they go, straight ahead, leading to that copse. And yonder, broken branches. . . . Voices and laughter! Ah, it is good to be with men again! . . .

And now the ‘Initiation’!

Night has come. A camp fire is burning. The boys are seated in a crescent. The crow’s head, the wolf’s head and the crocodile’s head, on the banners, bob about in the light of the flames.

Marnier holds Forgeot’s hat and pole.

And here comes Forgeot to the middle of the circle.

The Great Akela, the Chief, says:

‘Can I count on your honour that you will do your duty by your fatherland? That you will help others at all times? That you will obey the Scout Law?’

Forgeot lifts his right hand, his thumb is pressed tight on the nail of his little finger, the three other fingers are raised.

All are silent. There is something solemn about it all.

Forgeot says:

‘I promise to do my duty by my fatherland, to help others, to obey the Scout Law.’

The Boy Prophet

The Great Akela replies:

'I rely on your honour, that you will keep your promise. Now you belong to the great brotherhood of Scouts.'

And he shakes Forgeot's hand. And all the Scouts present arms with their poles. And the light of the fire reaches the clouds.

And in my heart I feel . . . I don't know what . . . tears. . . . Yes, tears, just as I do when I see a procession pass . . . or when I hear music played by many instruments.

It is quite true . . . their 'Initiation' is beautiful.

But a communion? . . . Where is God in all that?

§ 8

Gracious! Is this the man who is to teach me religion?

He is called Mr. Lobmann. He has round shoulders, a dirty frock-coat, an old hat, which he keeps on his head, blinking eyes, worried eyebrows, hairy fingers and black nails. He speaks through his nose with an Alsatian accent.

'So, my poy, you vant to pe Bar-Mitzvah. Very good. Ven vere you porn?'

'The seventeenth of October, 1911.'

'So, you vill pe almost two years behindhand. A

by Edmond Fleg

Yid must be Bar-Mitzvah at sirteen. Put I am not surprised! No one keeps anything seriously now-a-days. Vell . . . vell. Now let me have a look at my Louach.

And he turns over the leaves of a little green book.

'What is that little book?'

'That is my Louach.'

'And what is a Louach?'

'It's the Yids' calendar.'

'And Yids, what is that?'

'Yids, as we say now-a-days, are Israelites in every-day language.'

. . . And he smiles disgustedly, like Styrimovsky.

'Then Israelites have their own calendar?'

'Yes.'

'And it is not like the other calendar?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'You don't need to know vy. The brincibal thing is the Parscha.'¹

And he goes on turning over the leaves of the little book.

'Come, the seventeenth October, 1911, that makes the twenty-fifth Tishri.² And the 25th Tishri falls this year on a Tuesday. And ve have Shabbath³ the sirteenth of October.'

'Shabbath?'

¹ PARSCHA: portion of the Pentateuch.

² TISHRI: name of the month corresponding to Sept.-Oct.

³ SHABBATH: Saturday.

The Boy Prophet

' Yes, Shabbath, Saturday as we say now-a-days. So you will be Bar-Mitzvah on the sirteenth of October. And vat you must laien¹ for the sirteenth October? You laien Bereshith.² That is very vortunate. You are a Levy, aren't you? Vell then, you have the second Parscha. "Voyomer Elohim yehi rokiya." ' . . .

' The second Parscha! But what is a Parscha? '

' A piece vot you sing.'

' In Hebrew? '

' Naturally! Not in Japanese! '

' But I don't understand Hebrew.'

' You don't need to know it.'

' But I don't know even how to read Hebrew.'

' You don't need to. I write Hebrew in French characters, and I sing to you and you sing.'

' Is that all? '

' There is the Sacred History and the Catechism, as they say now-a-days. You vill learn that, but you don't need to know that: the brincibal thing is the Parscha! '

' And shall I be a Jew afterwards? '

' Vat's that, vill you be a Yid? Aren't you already? '

' Yes—no—perhaps; I don't know.'

' Vot's that? You don't know you're a Yid? That's extraordinary, 'pon my vord! But as Mr. Kahn sent me to have you Bar-Mitzvah, that's enough for me. It's

¹ LAIEN: literally to learn, to chant according to tradition.

² BERESHITH: the portions of the Pentateuch are designated by the first word of each. Bereshith is the first word of the whole Pentateuch.

by Edmond Fleg

a proof you are a Yid. I don't need to look at anything else!'

'But what must a Jew believe?'

'Vell! I've never been asked that before! Vat must a Jew believe? . . . For the last vorty years I have got boys ready to be Bar-Mitzvah. Meneschoume,¹ I have never been asked that!'

And he shakes with laughter.

'But . . . Mr. Lobmann . . .'

'The brincibal thing, I'm telling you, is the Parscha! Listen vile I sing your Parscha to you.'

And he opens another book, a Hebrew one, and he sings a litany, in the minor, which is all beginning and no end . . . which seems to come from a distant past, from the East. The words are sonorous and so lovely, but they are unknown to me.

'There you are! There's your Parscha. Are you satisfied now? I write it for you in French characters, and I sing it to you, and you sing it; and you are Bar-Mitzvah!'

'But it is impossible, Mr. Lobmann. There must be more than that! Surely there are things to be understood. A real Jew . . .'

'Naturally! A real Yid is from.² A real Yid eats kosher.³ Do your vamily eat kosher? A real Yid

¹ MENESCHOUME: really.

² FROM: pious, orthodox.

³ KOSCHER: the name for food which is pure, according to ritual.

lays his Tephillim.¹ Does your vather lay his Tephilim? Does he say his Benschén?² Does he hold a Seider?³ Does he fascht⁴ Yom Kippur?⁵ No? Then if he does not, you won't neither? And if you are not going to, you don't need to know about that. I'm telling you, the brincibal thing is the Parschal!'

'But the communion, Mr. Lobmann, the Bar-Mitzvah?' . . .

'If you vant to know vat a Bar-Mitzvah is, come to Schul with me.'

'Schul?'

'Yes. Schul, the synagogue, the temple, as they say now-a-days. Are you still hafing holidays from school? All right! I'll fetch you on Shabbath, at seven o'clock in the morning. . . . I'll take you to Schul, and you will see vat a Bar-Mitzvah is!'

Alas! I know what a Bar-Mitzvah is!

§ 9

At table Father says:

'Well, Claude, how is your Bar-, what d'you call it,

¹ TEPHILLIM: leather straps, which are bound round the head and left arm at the time of the morning prayer.

² BENSCHEN: benediction after meals.

³ SEIDER: a family feast held at Easter.

⁴ FASCHT: from *faschten*, to fast.

⁵ YOM KIPPUR: the Day of Atonement.

by Edmond Fleg

getting on? . . . I met your master, Mr. Lobmann, at the foot of the stairs as I was coming in. We had a chat. . . . His is a very distinguished mind! . . . You must be delighted.' . . .

. . . Oh, that little smile . . . that little smile at the corner of his mouth!

I would have liked to hide under the carpet!

And that night, in bed, I thought:

'God of Israel! God of Israel! What a master you have given me. . . . If the Scribes were like that, I do understand Jesus!'



I saw Mariette in front of the Cathedral. She walked towards me. I looked the other way. She stood still, as if she had been turned to stone, just as I did last year in the porch when she passed me by.

Poor Mariette! She must have felt hurt!

But she would have asked me!

'And your Jewish communion?'

What could I have answered?

. . . You can pray for me, Mariette, you can pray for me!

§ 10

Then what? Stick in stamps again?

I haven't the courage. I am disgusted with my stamps. The more so since I have seen a collection of Marnier's.

His is not a stamp collection, but photos, lots and lots of photos of all sorts of animals; snapshots of pheasants shaking their crests or spreading their tails like peacocks; does on the watch, larks on the edge of their nest; a leaping chamois; teal, water-fowl, wild duck.

I asked him:

'Where did you get all these snapshots?'

'Well . . . it is like this: Father loves shooting, so I said to him, "What is it you like so much about shooting? Killing game? No? It is the lying-in-wait, the beat and the chase, you love. Now, promise me one thing, Dad, instead of a gun you'll take a kodak with you, and instead of killing things you'll photograph them." At first he laughed and would not hear of it. But in the end he gave in . . . half. He takes a kodak with him as well as his gun. Nevertheless he kills only half what he used to: that's so much to the good.'

'So all those animals he has snapped owe their lives to you?'

by Edmond Fleg

'You bet!'

'But who gave you the idea?'

'It's a Scout idea.'

Ah! if only Mr. Lobmann had a few of the Scout ideas!

§ 11

How could she have guessed that when I pretended not to see her the other day, that it was because I felt ashamed, ashamed of Mr. Lobmann, ashamed of his Bar-Mitzvah?

Instead of being huffy with me yesterday, when she saw me in the Place du Parvis, she took me by the hand and led me away. I said nothing. And we went in.

Immediately on the right, the big Crucifix.

She knelt down.

'Kneel, Claude dear.'

How I wish I could! I have been longing to for ages! To be on my knees in the shadows! To pray! Who prevents me? Mr. Lobmann's God? Mr. Lobmann's Parscha?

'Listen to this prayer; I have made it up for you. I say it every morning and every evening. And I shall

The Boy Prophet

say it every morning and every evening until you are saved, my Claude! ’

And she prays in her little voice:

‘ Sweet Jesus, Lord of goodness and mercy, deign to lift the bandage from his eyes, that he may perceive the glory of thy love.

‘ That thy blood, shed by his ancestors, fall on his heart in a dew of salvation, so that he may partake of thy Blessed Sacrament and, renewed by thy flesh, he may have his share in thy infinite grace, in this world and in the world to come. Amen.

‘ And now, repeat it, Claude. Kneel down. Repeat your prayer! ’

. . . To go on my knees! To go on my knees! If only I could! . . .

And suddenly my knees give, quite independently of my will. I had not told them to give . . . I feel them giving . . . the touch of the cold stone. My head feels heavy; it is bowed, it touches the stone, even as my knees.

How sweet is the silence around me. She is there, close to me. And He, close to us!

‘ Repeat your prayer. Repeat it: Gentle Jesus, Lord of goodness and mercy . . . ’

‘ Gentle Jesus, Lord of goodness and mercy . . . ’

‘ Deign to lift the bandage from my eyes . . . ’

by Edmond Fleg

'Deign to lift . . .'

I cannot! I order my lips to move. They refuse.

I feel them motionless, rigid as stone.

'Deign to lift the bandage from my eyes . . .'

'Deign . . .'

No! No! I cannot!

What is it bursting in my heart, tearing my throat, thundering at my temples? Is it a tempest wanting to be freed from within me?

. . . Shuddering sobs . . .

'You are saved, Claude, you are saved!'

. . . She thought I had found salvation!

§ 12

On Saturday morning, at seven o'clock, Mr. Lobmann rang at the door.

'I have come to fetch the boy for the Bar-Mitzvah.'

What is the use now?

Mother had ordered the chauffeur; he was waiting outside. But Mr. Lobmann says to him:

'No, thank you. We walk on foot. A Yid walks on foot on Shabbath.'

And here we are, the two of us, walking to Schul.¹

¹ SCHUL: synagogue.

The Boy Prophet

I look at Mr. Lobmann. Why does he look so different to-day?

His long frock-coat is quite clean, his silk hat is all shiny. His eyes are not blinking, his eyebrows don't look worried.

'You are looking at me, boy, aren't you? I look bleased to-day? Because to-day is Shabbath, you understand. On Shabbath a Yid is a king!'

The big synagogue is deserted. Do Jews go there only for weddings?

No flowers. No canopy. The light is too bright on those too empty benches.

Here and there a few men are unfolding the fringed shawls with which they cover their shoulders.

In front of a red velvet table, the Singer, in a square cap, is mumbling words at a tremendous speed.

In the rear, at the top of the steps, on either side of a gold-embroidered curtain, stand two immense eight-branched silver candlesticks.

Were the candlesticks in the Temple at Jerusalem like these? In my sixth form History-book I think they were seven-branched.

'Then why are these eight-branched?'

No answer from Mr. Lobmann.

A rabbi to the right. A rabbi to the left.

by Edmond Fleg

‘What is behind that curtain?’

No answer from Mr. Lobmann.

He unfolds his white woollen shawl; it has black stripes. Wherever did he find it? . . . Shutting his eyes, he kisses the fringe as if to savour it. Then he covers his round shoulders, whilst he mutters indistinct sounds.

Now he has opened his Hebrew book on the desk. He sways backwards and forwards, he sways, he sways; and nasally intones a vague chant.

How happy Mr. Lobmann looks . . . How lonely I feel. Nothing of what I see reminds me of anything.

I feel so far away from the Scouts; so far from the enveloping shadow of the church, so far from Jesus, whom I had so nearly adored! I feel an alien in this hard clear light! . . .

And suddenly I am frightened!

This light! What if the God, who is here, were the God who is everywhere? . . . I could see God in the darkness and I cannot see him in the light! . . .

And what if he punished me for feeling an alien in his light? . . . If he punished me for having knelt to another God? . . .

But now the great voice of the Singer is raised.

The Boy Prophet

And from above, the organ and the children give answer:

‘Schema Israel, Adonoi Eloheinou.’¹

It is like the announcement of a truth! And I do not understand it!

And now, what joy! And if heaven and earth were singing praise! And I, I do not sing!

I turn towards those voices . . . I envy them. . . . The synagogue is less empty. The faithful are still arriving. Nothing but men. Why? . . .

. . . Well, now . . . I hadn’t noticed that! The back of each seat serves as a desk to the seat behind it. There is a name written on each desk. . . .

. . . Oh, that fat man coming in. . . . How late he is. What is he doing? . . . He is holding a bunch of keys. Fancy, there is a lock in the seat. He turns the key, he lifts the lid. Who would have thought it . . . each seat is a little cupboard? He finds his book, his praying shawl. He puts down the lid. He sits down. . . .

More men. Nothing but men. And the ladies? Where are they? Don’t they say prayers? . . . Ah, I see them, up there in a gallery!

‘Why aren’t they downstairs like us?’

¹ Hear, O Israel, the Eternal is our God.

by Edmond Fleg

No answer from Mr. Lobmann. The beadle, in his peaked hat and with his breast all shining with medals, has just handed him a little square bit of cardboard.

‘What is that?’

No answer from Mr. Lobmann.

The beadle goes up the steps. He turns a handle. The embroidered curtain opens slowly.

Oh, all those big headless dolls, dressed in velvet, standing close to each other!

‘What are they?’

No answer from Mr. Lobmann. He doesn’t even know I am there. His eyes are bigger. His back is straighter!

The rabbi mounts two steps higher. He prays without moving his lips, his fingers intertwined.

He has taken one of the big dolls in his arms. He has handed it to the other rabbi. Another to the Singer. And he keeps yet another, leaning on his shoulder.

Now they descend the steps. The beadle, with his peaked hat and glittering breast, walks ahead of them.

How beautiful the chants!

They come down the broad aisle, one behind the other, carrying the big red dolls, between the regular rows of seats. Then slowly, very slowly, preceded by the peaked hat and the shiny medals, they return in our direction.

As they pass, all the men draw together. What are they doing? . . . What is Mr. Lobmann doing with

The Boy Prophet

his fringed shawl? He kisses a corner of it so lovingly, and so lovingly he strokes the big doll with the corner of his shawl as it is carried past.

Now they are undressing it! But it is not a doll! . . . It is a double scroll of parchment. There are words inscribed on it . . . Hebrew words, doubtless! It is like a book, a very long book, which unrolls. The Singer shows it to everyone. . . . He holds it aloft as the priest raises the Host in church. . . .

. . . Is their God in that book as the other one is in the Host?

The Singer reads in a sing-song. There is a gentleman, wearing a top-hat, at his side. . . . This, this must be a Parscha, I feel sure. I recognise the minor melody, which always begins and never ends. . . .

The men behind me are chattering. Over there, on the left, one is reading a newspaper. . . .

Oh, that little boy who has left his seat. Where is he going? . . . all alone, like a Scout! . . . Up there? . . . Towards the rabbi? . . .

He has a new silk shawl, it has beautiful blue stripes. And a bowler hat!

Up he goes, quite alone. He isn't frightened. . . . And he is smaller than I. . . .

Fancy! He takes the Singer's place. With a corner

by Edmond Fleg

of his shawl he transmits a kiss to the Hebrew words. And now he is singing! He is singing a Parscha with all his fluty little voice. . . .

Not another sound in the whole big synagogue. Nothing but that little voice singsonging. Every one is quiet. Every one listens.

Mr. Lobmann is on the alert for every single word. What if his pupil were to get muddled? . . . No, no . . . not a hesitation . . . not a false note! . . . Mr. Lobmann sways his head. Mr. Lobmann is well satisfied. . . . So this is a Bar-Mitzvah! It is charming! But what does it mean?

The communicant has finished. The rabbi congratulates him. His father kisses him. How pleased he is! . . .

He did sing well. But what has he understood?

Forgeot understood his 'Initiation'! And as for Mariette's prayer, even I understood that!

Now it is Mr. Lobmann's turn. He advances proudly. He takes the double scroll in his hands. He raises it with dignity. Ah, Mr. Lobmann is no longer a Scribe, a Pharisee! His eyes are flaming; his cheeks glowing. His top-hat shines like a crown. Mr. Lobmann is a king!

Keys turn in locks. Shawls are folded up; books shut; lids bang down.

The Boy Prophet

Old men, men and boys are standing before the embroidered curtain. Crêpe bands are round the hats of most of them. They pray. They pray together. They take two paces backwards. They bow. They take two paces forwards. . . .

‘What are they doing? Why?’

But still no answer from Mr. Lobmann. He waits until they have gone down the steps, till the doors are open and people are leaving the synagogue. And at last he says, very severely:

‘Vy for do you ask questions all the time? Ven I pray, I am talking to the Almighty. And ven I am talking to the Almighty, if the Bresident of the Republic himself asks questions, Mr. Lobmann does not answer them!’

§ 13

I thought we were going to leave the synagogue. . . . But where is Mr. Lobmann taking me? . . . To that splendid-looking rabbi, with a nose like Jupiter’s and a waterfall of a beard, who is carefully folding his praying shawl?

He speaks to him. They are talking about me:

‘Doctor, here is a boy whom I have to brebare for his Bar-Mitzvah, and he asks questions just as if he wanted to be a rabbi. My vord, I can’t answer them. Berhaps you vill be able to.’

by Edmond Fleg

Jupiter smiles.

'What is your name, my young friend?'

'Claude Levy.'

'He's the son of Vireless Telephony,' adds Mr. Lobmann, proudly.

'Ah?' says the rabbi. 'Good, very good. And you want to be Bar-Mitzvah? Good, very good.'

The rabbi is very handsome. But he looks so discouraged.

'What is this, that Mr. Lobmann tells me? You have a somewhat inquiring mind? Good, very good.'

And he moves his hands about as if he were washing them.

'I have it, I have it. Mr. Lobmann is a pious and worthy man, but he does not always know how to convey his piety to others. . . . Come and see me presently, my young friend. I live close by. Mr. Lobmann will bring you. Will you not, Mr. Lobmann? . . . And we shall talk over this matter of your Bar-Mitzvah.'

Mr. Lobmann was kind enough to take me; but only as far as the door.

'Go up alone. I'll wait downstairs. The rabbis of to-day are too Goy¹ for me!'



How unpretentious everything is in this study. Our Latin master, Vernet, must have a place like this.

¹ Goy: non Jew.

The Boy Prophet

The rabbi is very handsome. His beard is white. His hair is white. He wears a black velvet skull-cap.

'Now then, my young friend, what is it you want to know.'

'How to be a Jew.'

'To be an *Israelite*?'

He pronounces the word as if he loved it.

'How to be an *Israelite*?'

He clears his throat. . . . How discouraged he looks. . . . And that little smile at the corner of his mouth, father's smile!

'Our religion is learnt above all in the bosom of one's family. . . . I gather that your people are not orthodox. . . . Well, I could answer your questions by citing Moses: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There you have our Law. All the rest is but commentary.'

'But it was Jesus who said that!'

He smiles.

'Jesus said it. But Moses had said it before he did.'

'Moses said it!'

'It is so, my young friend. Deuteronomy, vi. 5; Leviticus xix. 33.'

by Edmond Fleg

. . . I seem to hear Vernet, the Latin master:

'*Ænæad* xvi. 33.' . . .

'Moses said it!'

The rabbi is quite melancholy.

'Yes, yes, there is but little in the Gospels that you cannot find was first said by our Prophets and Sages.'

'Then Jesus . . .'

'Jesus seems to have been a very noble inheritor of the spirit of Israel. But our Prophets were modest. They knew themselves to be sinners. . . . Jesus . . .'

'Jesus considered himself without sin! Jesus thought himself God.'

'Yes, it would certainly appear that Jesus thought himself God.'

'A human God! It is impossible, isn't it, sir? Would it be a sin to kneel before a human God?'

'A human God! . . . When a human being is a real human being it is something to be thankful for.'

And again he moves his hands as if he were washing them.

'And the Messiah for whom Israel was waiting, it wasn't Jesus, was it, sir?'

'As far as I can see, the Messiah has not yet come!'

'Then you do expect the Messiah, sir?'

The Boy Prophet

He clears his throat. He smiles a little, a smile just like Father's.

'We all expect a Messiah, my child. We all await him.'

. . . All that the rabbi says is beautiful, but I feel sad when he speaks. Why?

I glance at him. He has a constrained look.

'Now, with regard to your Bar-Mitzvah.' . . .

'I know nothing about it, sir. I can't grasp anything! For instance, that book which was unrolled just now?'

'That is the Torah, the Law of Moses, our Sacred Law. It is customary to read a portion of that Law every Sabbath.'

'And a boy who is being Bar-Mitzvah, reads from the Book like a priest?'

'Yes, on that day he becomes a priest. All true Israelites are priests.'

'All? Then what about the rabbis?'

'The rabbis only know more than the rest . . . or at least they think they know more!'

That smile again!

'But, sir, if all Israelites are priests . . .'

'I cannot satisfy such avid curiosity in five minutes.'

He goes to his book-shelves:

by Edmond Fleg

'Here, my child, take this book. You will find it contains selected texts from the Pentateuch and the Prophets, from our Psalms and Prayers, stories from the Talmud and a description of our family and public services, the reflections of our Sages, pages of our history, and a study of our prolonged mission, from the olden days right through to our own times. Read it, think it well over, my young friend, and come back to see me.'

. . . Exactly like Vernet, the Latin master.

Mr. Lobmann was waiting at the door:

'Vat has he given you? Another book? Vat's the use of that? The Parscha is the brincibal thing. I am telling you!'

But I hug the book under my arm: at last I shall know.



I USED to be made to read Cornelius Nepos, Xenophon, Roland's Song, Nicomedes, Kipling and Jules Verne. And these glorious stories were kept hidden from me!

Adam, Eve, the Serpent; Noah and the Ark on the great waters; Abraham and his son, who was delivered by a ram; Jacob sleeping on a pillow of stone, from which a ladder reached up to heaven; Rebecca at the well, with Eliezer; Joseph restraining his tears at the sight of his brethren; and the ten plagues, and the Red Sea and Mount Sinai.

I go with the youth David to the banks of the stream to choose the stone which was to slay Goliath. I weep with Jonathan on the heights of Gilboa. Like Solomon, I enter the cedar-walled Temple, where the wide-winged Cherubim sit face to face. I hear the singing of psalms and the harps of the Levites. Mingling with a crowd, I prostrate myself beneath the outstretched hands of the High Priest, who blesses Israel! He stands before the jacinth-hued curtain, wearing his blue tiara, his tinkling robe and the breastplate of twelve sparkling stones.

How fragrant is the love of the Shulamite! How melancholy Solomon's old age! What despair there is

Edmond Fleg

in Job's sorrow as he questions God from his seat on the dung-heap!

And the Prophets! What giants!

With an outstretched hand Moses divides the sea and lends celestial voice to the mountain lightning. For Elijah the portals of heaven open and shut. Ezekiel has dreams which give new life to dry bones. Jeremiah transforms the granite of the rocks into a river of tears. Isaiah makes the waters of consolation gush from the desert!

And I knelt before Jesus, I admired the Scout Law and I read Jules Verne and Cornelius Nepos!

§ 2

'The Chosen People!' . . .

One people set above the others? Why?

'The mission of Israel!' . . .

Israel should have a mission and not others? . . .

I can't understand. . . .

If only I knew how to think. . . . Mother was so anxious about me yesterday:

'The child is precocious.' . . .

Precocious . . . me! Ah, Pascal, what about you?

The Boy Prophet

'The mission of Israel!'

I know from history, that Beauty was the spirit of Athens; Power the spirit of Rome. . . .

Would then the mission of a people be its spirit?

Israel, what is your spirit?



'And in thee shall all families be blessed.' . . .

Then Israel's mission would not be confined to Israel? . . .

Israel, what is your mission?



'The Unity of God.' . . .

Can God be manifold?

All the gods of mythology: Jupiter, Venus, Olympus, Isis, Osiris, Baal, Astarte. . . .

Oh, how I wish I knew how to think!



How the Hebrew Prophets mocked idols!

The pagan fells an oak in the forest. He makes a fire of two logs and he roasts his meat. And he sits down and he eats. Then he makes a God of the trunk; bows down before it and calls out:

'Hear me, O my God!'

by Edmond Fleg

You do not want us to make graven images, God of Israel! You cast out the idolaters!

And I, did I not worship an image?

The image of Jesus, it too is an image! . . . And the Saints of the Church, images, images!

'Hear, O Israel! The Eternal is our God.' . . .

Styrinovsky does not want to believe in this Eternal God. . . . Thought went to the making of my watch, then did no thought go to the creation of the Universe? . . .

'By the word of the Lord were the Heavens made. For He spake and it was done. He is the Lord, and none other without Him is naught!' . . .

You are not a God to be eaten! You are not a God to be drunk, God of Israel! . . .



God, O God, you who are present everywhere throughout the world, and beyond the world. You know that I am seeking you, God who cannot be seen: help me to find you, even though I cannot see you!

I feel your presence, you are there. So far off in the infinite, yet so close to my heart!

The Boy Prophet

You spoke with Abraham and Moses, with all your servants. Would you be dumb with a little child?



'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might. . . .'

He made man in his image.

. . . Man resembles God as a child resembles his father.

He loves as a father . . . he punishes and forgives as a father.

To love him, to love him as a father! . . .

Yes, I love you, invisible Father, ever-present father of all! . . . I love you, I love you as a son loves his father! . . .



The mission! The mission of Israel. . . . I understand now, it came to me when I read this prayer:

'Let us praise the Lord of all things, let us exalt the Creator of the world.

'He has not made us as other peoples: we are not as they, their portion is not our portion, nor our destiny their destiny.

'It is we who, when we bow down, adore the King of Kings, blessed be He, the Holy One, who stretched

by Edmond Fleg

out the heavens and moulded the earth, whose glory dwells in the highest heavens, whose splendour and power fill the Universe.

‘He is our God. There is none other: He is our God, the true God, there is none other.’ . . .

He chose a people to proclaim his glory! I am a son of that people, chosen by the Lord. And I did not know it. I was never told:

§ 3

I have received a letter from Mariette:

‘You were not able to pray, Claude dear, but you will be able to before long. It must be so.

‘My prayer is not enough to save you, yours too is necessary. I enclose it. If you love me, pray!’

And with her letter, this prayer:

‘Sweet Jesus, Lord of Goodness and mercy, deign to lift the bandage from my eyes, so that I may see the glory of thy love. That thy blood, shed by my ancestors, fall on my heart in a dew of salvation, so that I may partake of thy Blessed Sacrament and that renewed by thy flesh. . . .’

Poor Mariette!

§ 4

On Friday evening the father blesses his children:

'May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you peace.'

When did my father bless me?

On Saturday evening the father fills a goblet with wine; he lights a light and burns spices; he praises God, who gives the fruit of the vine and who separates light from darkness, the righteous from the unrighteous, the Jews from the other peoples, the Sabbath from the other days.

When did my father praise God?

On the eve of Passover the unleavened bread is placed on the table, with the lamb, the mortar and the bitter herbs. And the father tells his children of the bondage in Egypt, the words of Moses, the waters turned to blood, the frogs, the lice, the boils, the darkness, the death of the first-born and the parting of the sea for the delivered people.

by Edmond Fleg

Father! Father, what have you told me?

On the Feast of Succoth,¹ did you place in my hand the palm and the citron, which are swung to a chant? At Rosh Hashana,² did you take me to hear the trumpet call to repentance, as God judges the living and inscribes in his book the rewards and punishments? At Kippur,³ did you show me those who fast and pray, clad in the shrouds they will wear in the grave, who confess aloud all the sins of the world and plead to the ever-forgiving Father for mercy?

Yet God commanded:

'Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach your children . . .'

Father, father, what have you taught me?

§ 5

I wanted to go into the big church again.

Always the same gentle quiet of the shadows, the benediction of the organ. But I know now who prevented me from praying. . . .

¹ SUCCOTH: Feast of Tabernacles.

² ROSH HASHANA: Feast of the New Year.

³ YOM KIPPUR: Day of Atonement.

The Boy Prophet

The confessional draws me no longer. Why?
And Jesus . . . had I forgotten him?
I stand before him. My knees do not give. . . .

. . . Your blood on us, Jesus? Eternally on us and
on our children? But it was your children who burned
Joan, sweet Joan of Arc. Will her ashes be upon them?
They burned her: then they made her one of their
saints. Why should not the Jews who crucified you
make you one of their prophets? . . .

Your Cross, Jesus! . . . It was cruel indeed. But
for how many hours did you suffer? And Israel, for
how many centuries?

I know now what Israel has suffered. Do you know,
Jesus?

You carried your Cross on the road to Golgotha.
And a whole town jeered and spat in your wake.

But how many crosses have they borne along all the
roads of the earth? . . .

. . . Do you see them, Jesus? Those processions of
ragged, famished outcasts on the roads? And whole
nations deriding them:

'Sorcerers! Lepers! Birds of ill-omen! To death
with the Jews! They worship the head of an ass! They
poison the wells! They stab the sacraments! They
bleed children! Traitors: Usurers! Communists!

by Edmond Fleg

Death to them! They willed the war! They willed the peace! They want the world to end! ' . . .

They scourged your son, Virgin Mary, they crowned him with thorns, they nailed him to a Cross. And you weep at the foot of the Cross. You weep, Mary, and I weep with you.

But can you not hear in the voice of the organ the lamentations of another Mother? Does your sorrow blind you to that Mother, still more sorrowful than you? Our Mother, Rachel, weeping for her children?

Her first-born? Her little ones. She holds them close to her bosom. One by one, by thousands and thousands, Pharaoh snatches them from her and tosses them into the Nile.

How she weeps! How she sobs! Her hair falls over her face. She wrings her hands.

And yonder, that hedge of impaled corpses, which goes seven times round the city. . . . Nebuchadnezzar piles high the severed heads. . . . Yes, those heads in his hands are your sons, Rachel, your sons. . . .

And those that Titus drags behind his chariot. The mob howls in the circus. . . . The lion . . . the panther. . . . They are your sons, Rachel, the jaws will crunch!

And those! And those! And those! In the slave-market, sold by auction like meat. Turning the mill like blind horses. In the galley with convicts. On the wheel. In chains. On the strappado.

The Boy Prophet

How Rachel weeps! How she wrings her hands!

And now the Crusaders are leaving for the Holy Land. They go to deliver the Holy Sepulchre. . . .

Were they obliged to leave all those bloody crosses in the ghettos as they went their way? . . .

And the stakes, all those flaming pyres, the pervading stench of burning flesh! . . . They are your sons, Rachel, your sons, who burn! . . .

And now, the Cossacks of Chmielnicki, who tie them by their feet to the tails of their horses! What a gallop of corpses over the frozen steppes! . . . And now by Wrangel and Denikin they are knouted, mown down, hanged on trees like snuffed-out lanterns. Their mouths and eyes are filled with petrol; they are buried alive, with their heads above ground; they are shot at with rifles, with cannon, with machine-guns! . . .

Oh, Virgin Mary, you who weep for your only son, look, look at our Mother Rachel, weeping for millions of her sons! . . .

Because they would not accept your Jesus as Messiah. . . . Because they await another Messiah!

Did Pharaoh, did Nebuchadnezzar, kill in the name of the God of Love? But for centuries and centuries, Jesus, your kings, your priests, your soldiers crucify us.

by Edmond Fleg

And your blood should be upon us? No, Jesus, no! It is our blood that will be upon you!

The Messiah of Peace, the Messiah of Justice, the Messiah announced by our prophets! You thought yourself the Messiah, dear suffering Jesus!

Peace! Justice on earth! Where is peace, Jesus, where is justice? Does the wolf lie near the lamb? Does the tiger lie down with the kid? Do the bear and the heifer frequent the same pasture? Are the swords beaten into ploughshares, the pikes into pruning-hooks?

No, no! Destruction goes on, evil is done. The earth is not yet filled with the knowledge of God. . . . No, he is not yet come, the son of David, on whom shall be the breath of God, the spirit of wisdom and intelligence, the spirit of council and power! He who will judge the poor with equity and enact justice for the lowly! He is not come, he is not come, he who will ordain that no people shall draw the sword against another people!

Do you not hear the voice of Israel, Jesus, that voice arising from the bloody rivers, from the wood of the gallows and the wood of the stake, that voice which cries: 'He is not come, he is not come, he is not come!' . . .

What are you doing? How did you descend from your Cross? . . . You drive your crown of thorns into

my brow? . . . You spit at me, with the mouth which forgives? . . . Your mortifying hand strikes me? . . . And now. . . . Where did you find that hammer . . . those nails? . . . Are they the nails from your ankles, from your pierced hands? . . .

Oh, Jesus, Jesus . . . you for whom I have so often wept? . . . What are you doing to me? Where is your mercy? . . . Where your love? You close your eyes . . . your face is lifeless and you strike. . . . Oh! the thud of the hammer on the nails. . . . Oh! those nails in my grating bones. . . . Crucified Jesus, who crucifies me! Oh! your Cross, your Cross, which rears itself up, and I am on your Cross.

My blood gushes over you. My blood falls on you! My blood will be upon you. Can I forgive you? You who know what you do! . . .

Nevertheless, I forgive you, Jesus, as you forgave. But, nailed by you, in your place, on the Cross, I cry aloud: 'He is not come! The world is still waiting for him! The world awaits our Messiah!'

§ 6

I met her. I took her with me. Night was covering the point of the Island. We huddled close together. A sad mist was all around us.

by Edmond Fleg

'I shall never be a Christian!'

'But you knelt, you almost prayed.' . . .

'I shall never be a Christian!'

'Why? Why?'

She is sobbing in my arms. Her tears flow down close to my mouth. What is this strange stirring in my innermost being?

'Wait a little longer, Claude. You will see. A miracle will happen. I have prayed so hard. I shall pray so hard. We shall both pray.' . . .

'I shall never, never be a Christian!'

§ 7

To what a strange quarter Styrimovsky took me this morning. It is quite near my home, and so far off. One goes over the bridge, one turns to the right, behind the Hôtel de Ville, and one comes upon a new world.

The street is too narrow, the houses too high and all covered with cracks. Between the shacks, dreary courtyards, dimly lit with dreary lights. There is Hebrew lettering on the posters, on the signboards, and even on the labels on the bottles exposed in the wine merchants' windows.

The old-clothes man is a buyer of 'old newspaper, rags, crusts, old iron, tailors' and cap-makers' clip-

The Boy Prophet

pings'; the baker sells twisted loaves, and the bookshop Yiddish gramophone records.

The cobbler, in his window, wears big spectacles shading his reddened eyelids, and corkscrew curls fall over each ear. The old woman, who deals in carp and smoked tongue, wears a black wig parted smoothly in the middle, from under which grey frizzy wisps escape on to her forehead.

Three women are gesticulating in the butcher's shop. She with the hooked nose has a knitted purple shawl over her scraggy shoulders! She with the blotchy cheeks wears a silk dress and a fur collar. The third has a shrewd look; her lustreless fair hair is covered with a Spanish mantilla. They are all very old and very ugly, and I can't understand their language. Everything about them is foreign to me. And yet I can't tear myself away from them, and I feel so moved that I want to cry! Why?

Frizzy-haired children are coming from school; they squabble in a strange jargon. Behind them walks a kind of Mr. Lobmann, but still dirtier.

'Your future comrades,' says Styrinovsky, wrinkling up his little nose.

'My comrades, why?'

'You aren't going to stop at school, I suppose? A good Jew doesn't write on Saturdays.'

by Edmond Fleg

Around the table, in the mean restaurant, sit five old men. They have kept their battered hats on their heads; their long beards dip into their plates.

'This is where you will come for meals,' says Styri-novsky, his lips curling ironically.

'I? You are joking!'

'What's that? You still want to take your meals in your mother's house, where she feeds you like a Goy? Have your rabbis taught you nothing? A good Jew eats neither oysters nor mussels, neither lobster nor crayfish, no eels and no finless fish. He doesn't eat thrush, or woodcock, or pheasant, or pork, or hare, or venison, or any other game. He won't eat even beef, or veal, or mutton if the cattle have been slaughtered in the Goy way! Ah, it is true enough our God is not one to be eaten, but he makes the devil of a fuss about what may be eaten! . . .

'And the Law of Moses, our blessed Moses! Don't you know that? Ah, it's a bit more complicated than Scout Law. The number of things you have to do, and the number of things you may not do. . . .

'You have to tie up your temples and left arm with leather straps, sew white fringes on to the four corners of your flannel vest, nail a little iron tube on to the lintel of your door, and say the Schema every morning and evening, and recite a hundred blessings every day: when you get up, when you go to bed, when you eat, when you drink; on going out and on coming in; when

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you are well, when you are ill, when the weather is fine and when it is cold; when you see a dog and when you see a king, et cetera, et cetera. . . .

‘ And you mustn’t smoke on Saturdays, nor buy nor sell on Saturdays, nor drive on Saturdays, nor blow your nose on Saturdays, nor do your hair like a Goy, nor marry like a Goy, et cetera, et cetera. . . . In all, six hundred and thirteen commandments, old man. Three hundred and sixty-five which tell you what not to do, and two hundred and forty-eight which tell you what you are to do! If you want to be orthodox you can have nothing in common with a Goy! You can say “good-bye” to your father and mother, to the Scouts, your friends and acquaintances! And if you are not orthodox you are no Jew!’

‘ But all the Jews I saw in synagogue, at my uncle’s wedding? Are they orthodox?’

‘ Israelites! Oh, that lot! They go to synagogue for weddings, and that’s that! But their children won’t put a foot in one. If there were nothing left but the Israelites to save Israel! Help! No, no, old man, of four things one. Either Judaism is a religion; then come and eat here, come and pray here, come and live here, the Ghetto, old man, return to the Ghetto . . . or Judaism is a nationality; then return to your fatherland, next year in Jerusalem . . . or it is both: then go and pray to God in your own land . . . or it is neither one

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nor the other: then be a good Frenchman and let's hear no more about it!' . . .

That is what Styrinovsky says. How can I answer him? He is older than I and he knows more than I do.

I know nothing, nothing, nothing!

§ 8

The other day the Cabinet Minister came to lunch.

I was at table. During dessert he spoke about the World Peace, about Social Justice. He waxed very eloquent. He said the sort of things that Isaiah said about the Messiah, in the Bible.

Father listened. He did not smile his little smile.

Is Father awaiting the Messiah without knowing it? Funny!

§ 9

I went back to the Ghetto, but alone.

It was Friday evening. It was raining; the strange street was dark.

Who led me to that too high house, with its too illuminated, too narrow windows?

It is their synagogue, I think. Yes, their synagogue.

Here they come, hurried, bent, damp, like phantoms

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of the night. From my post at the entrance I see them emerge from the shade into the light, and the phantoms suddenly change into clothes, frock-coats and long beards, beneath umbrellas.

They go in to pray. I dare not go in. Why? They are all together, they feel they are all together. And I remain alone in the rain like a beggar. Why?

I know the prayers they are going to say. I read them in French, in the rabbi's book. The glorification of Him who opens the doors of heaven, and who assigns their proper places in the firmament to the stars; the benediction of Him who supports the faltering, heals the sick, delivers the captive and keeps His promise to those who sleep in the dust; Israel's greeting to the Betrothed, the Virgin Sabbath, and the sanctification of the Chosen People.

True, their prayers are beautiful, but how can I join them in prayer? I do not want to live as they do.

Beautiful, too, is the sacred Law, which commands me to love the Lord our God, with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might, and to love my neighbour as myself, to love the stranger as myself, to love the poor as myself; to let the orphan and the widow have their share of corn, fruit and olives.

But have I need of that Law which forbids me to eat as others, to dress as others, and to marry as others,

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in order to love God and my neighbour, the poor, the widow and the orphan? I prefer the Scout Law!

Have you suffered so greatly throughout the ages, my heroes, my ancestors, in order to feed differently from others? To have been spat upon, to have been tortured, to have been burned at the stake, just for that?

It would have been so simple for you to become Christians; a little water on the forehead, and you lived! But you would have none of it. Rather than that your fathers stabbed you. Your mothers threw you into the river or the flames. You sought to be burned, drowned, stabbed. For that? So as to eat no pork, no flesh which had not been bled, no milk after meat. For that? Is it possible?

Father said: 'You will soon get over your Ghetto nostalgia!'

Am I over it already?

He said: 'Neither Christians nor Jews; men!'

Is Father, with his little smile, right?

They are praying in their synagogue, the Jews of the Ghetto. And I am alone in the rain, alone in the darkness. Quite alone.

§ 10

No! It is really all too stupid. . . . Jew, or non-Jew, what does it matter?

The Boy Prophet

Who bothers about the Cross, the Ghetto, the Law, the Messiah? Do they think about it at school? And Father, and Mother, and the Cabinet Minister, and all our visitors, do they think about all that?

All the nights I cried. . . . My shame, my fears, my nightmares! . . .

And even when I was quite small, Christmas . . . the empty slippers in the fireplace. . . . And Mariette! Mariette! What I have suffered through Mariette! And later, at the point of the Island, the river calling to me because I was not a Christian! . . .

And now, because I am not a Jew, I . . .

No! Enough, enough! . . . I am going to be like others, like all the others! . . .



YES, like the others. . . . And to begin with, Mariette. . . .

Why haven't I seen her again? Because she cried so, when I told her I shall never be a Christian? I could not bear to see her cry.

She, doubtless, is praying. It is an obsession of hers. Formerly, before her Communion, she was coquettish, jolly, greedy, despotic: she was alive. Now she is nothing but a prayer. And she is waiting for a miracle to turn me into a Christian!

And I? I am waiting for nothing at all. I am resigned.

I should not see Mariette to-morrow because, two thousand years ago, men crucified a man!

I should see you, my darling! I shall see you! No more Jews, no more Christians. You shall be my little wife, in spite of Jews and Christians!

§ 2

What a splendid hour I have just spent! . . . Marnier was right. I was always in the clouds. Now he has taught me I look at things as Scouts do.

The Boy Prophet

The garden beneath our windows, at the back of Notre Dame . . . I played there all my childhood, but I never *saw* it. How many times I have sat on the seats there, thinking of Mariette, of the Jews and of Jesus. And I don't know even the colour of the seats.

Had anyone asked me yesterday how many rows of chestnut trees there are between the railings of the Rue du Cloître and the parapet, I should have replied: Five. Well, I should have been wrong, there are seven, I have just counted them. And the number of seats! I thought there was the same number to each row—not at all! There are two to the first and fifth rows, three to the sixth, four to the seventh, five to the fourth and six to the second and third.

And I had no idea of it, it is extraordinary!

And the bandstand! I could have sworn it was a kiosk: it is only a small platform, with six lamp-posts and a railing.

And the steepled fountain; I have heard the splash of the water every night through my window since I was a baby. The fountain in the middle of the garden, which when I was tiny I used to call the baby chapel near the mother church . . . I have just discovered it!

It has two basins, not one; one on top of the other, both of different shape. The sides of the lower basin

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form straight lines, which intersect; those of the upper are curved and break the even flow of the water. In the three corners of the little shrine, on top, there are three statues; one holds a lance, the two others, swords; each is felling a three-headed dragon, from whose open jaws water gushes. Higher still, between the three double columns which support a canopy of stone tracery, the Virgin gazes over the Seine; in her arms she holds an Infant Jesus. . . .

I had never seen the lance, nor the spears, nor the dragons, nor the Infant Jesus in the Virgin's arms!

And in the background, against the hedge which separates the garden from the Cathedral, there is a monument. . . . Yes, a whole monument, well to the fore, which I had never noticed! A smiling face beneath a short-tailed periwig, with a dimpled chin like Marnier's. The bust is set on three stone volumes, on top of a high pedestal, and on the pedestal:

CARLO GOLDONI

1707—1793

Dono del Duca Melzi d'Epil

alla Città di Parigi

1906

Goldoni! Who was he? A poet, I think. . . . Yes,

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a poet . . . I have discovered a marble poet in the garden of Notre Dame!

Goldoni, the two basins, the kiosk, the seven rows of chestnut trees! What a lot of things I have discovered this morning in the space of an hour. And while I was looking about me, at the seats, the statue and the fountain, I was not thinking of the Jews, Mariette, or Jesus. I was not *thinking* at all, I was happy! . . .

So, if I were always looking about me, looking at everything, everywhere, as Scouts do, I should always be happy?

Notre Dame, for instance! Only to look thoroughly at Notre Dame would mean weeks and weeks of happiness. . . . The towers, and doorways, the buttresses, the apses. . . . And all this swarm of statues, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, saints, kings, monsters, gargoyles, wise and foolish virgins, burials, coronations, resurrections and assumptions! And the galleries, the cross-bars, tracery and turrets . . . all this forest in stone, mounting towards the spire! . . .

And the interior! To go within and *look!* There where I trembled, I dreamed, I wept, I never looked around me.

The bays of the nave . . . how many are there? And

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the side chapels, how many? The tombs? . . . Surely not two alike. . . . But how do they differ? And the wooden stalls? And the lamps? And the candles? And the rose windows?

To see, to see all the pictures in the stained-glass windows! . . . To see the Crucifix without thinking! To see in order to see how it is made. To see it for the sake of seeing!

And thus throughout life! To give up looking inwards. . . . To see things on the outside, like a good Scout! To look at the world and not think!

To look at the world—and *see*!

§ 3

How am I to speak to her? I have been on the look-out for her as formerly; I no longer meet her.

Is she hiding from me? Has she changed the times for her devotions in the church? Does she go there during my school hours, in order to make sure of not finding me at the door?

Or is she ill? Or has she gone away?
In a convent, maybe?

The Boy Prophet

No, she is not ill! She is in Paris! Her concierge told me so!

So you want to escape from me, little Mariette? We shall see! I have my plan! You shall not escape from me!

§ 4

Action too is good. To be useful, to do things. . . . A good deed a day. That is part of the Scout Law. . . .

Formerly, when I saw a poor man, a cripple, I wanted to help him, to give him something. . . . My heart failed me, my hand was stayed, I felt ashamed; I didn't dare!

Now I dare.

Wednesday, that weary old coster-woman. . . . I pushed her barrow to the top of the Rue St. Jacques. . . . She was surprised. . . . So was I!

And that lame dog yesterday. He was blind, I think. He was lost. I read the address on his collar, and I just took him home. . . .

And to-morrow! What shall I do to-morrow? Ah, what about my Jules Verne? . . . That's an idea! I'll take them to the Hôtel-Dieu for the children's ward.

The mission of Israel! What need have I of Israel's

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mission? . . . To do a good deed every day is a mission too!

§ 5

It was she who waited for me at our door! . . .

So changed. . . . What eyes, poor Mariette!

'Come,' I said to her.

And she followed me without a word.

Why did we say nothing as we went along?

Why did I take her there, unintentionally, without noticing?

We went in, and we . . . How did it happen? How was it possible? We behaved like sight-seeing tourists, and *saw* the church!

A beadle was explaining, and taking round some foreigners. We followed them, mechanically.

'The organ was built in the reign of Louis XIV, by Theodor Lesclape, and repaired by Clicquot at the end of the eighteenth century. It has six thousand pipes, ten octaves, eighty-five stops, one hundred and ten registers, five keyboards and twenty-two combinations.'

At first I hardly listened. I could feel Mariette trembling at my side. In front of us, a big Englishman was counting the pipes, a field-glass to his eyes.

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'In the entrance to the choir, on the left, St. Denis by Nicholas Castou; on the right, Notre Dame de Paris, a statue originally in the porch of the Église Saint-Aignan. Below, you will notice, between the leaves of the cornice, Eve with a serpent's tail!'

The Englishman's field-glass is focussed on the leaves.

'In the choir, this bronze lectern is signed by Duplessis, the king's founder; the wooden stalls are decorated with bas-reliefs by Jean Nel and Louis Marteau, after the drawings by Jean de Goulon.' . . .

How strange! Is it less dark here than it used to be? I no longer feel the arches weighing on me. . . . But how Mariette is trembling! Why?

'In the windows of the north transept: Hosea, Joel, Obadiah, Judas, Michah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Nahum, Habakkuk. . . .

'In the windows of the south transept: Rehoboam, Aza, Jehoshaphat, Heboram, Joas, Ananias, Ozias, Saul, David, Solomon.' . . .

I look this time, so does Mariette. She looks at all those Hebrews in the stained-glass windows of the church.

Now we pass by the side chapels. The tomb of Monseigneur Affre, Archbishop of Paris; hit by a bullet before the barricade, he staggers, and he holds

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an olive branch. The tomb of Henri Claude d'Arcourt, Lieutenant-General of the royal army; he is sitting half up in his coffin, his kneeling wife is stretching out her arms to him. The tomb of Cardinal Bellay, died in 1808; with one hand he gives alms, with the other he holds an open book.

And now we are going down again. The chapel of the Sacred Heart, with paintings of angels holding censers. The chapel of Saint Anne with the tree of Jesse, showing on its branches Christ's ancestors, from Mary's husband as far back as Isaac's father. The chapel of Saint Peter; the chapel of the Souls in Purgatory. . . . And at last, right at the very end, the big Crucifix, with the crucified Christ on that Cross which had caused me such anguish! . . .

I look at it and I remember. And the beadle explains:

'It was given by the Pope Pius IX to the Emperor Napoleon III on the occasion of the Prince Imperial's christening. Placed just opposite to the Virgin, which is to be seen on the other side of the nave, this Crucifix . . .'

Now the visit is over. The Englishman goes off with his field-glass. The beadle goes back and jangles his keys.

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In the next chapel the candles are lit. A surpliced priest approaches with a chorister. Two old ladies kneel down. The mass begins.

Mariette leans against a pillar, she is quite near me. She is trembling.

And I look at Christ.

A railing. A placard: 'Remember those who died in the war.' Three clusters of tricoloured flags. And above, the nailed feet, the pierced body, the outstretched arms, the shoulders rising into shadow . . . and the head . . . invisible. . . .

I no longer see his agony!

The bell tinkles. The old ladies cross themselves. Mariette remains standing.

'Aren't you praying, Mariette?'

'If you only knew, Claude, if you only knew! . . . I can't pray any more!'

'You can't pray any more?'

'No, I can't, since . . .'

'Since?'

'Since you told me you will never be a Christian! . . . I kneel in St. Anne's chapel, in the chapel of the Sacred Heart, in all the chapels. And at night I go on my knees beside my bed. . . . And I can't pray! Instead of praying, I think of you! And I put sinful questions to myself. . . . You saw the windows just

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now: Jeroboam, Habakkuk, Solomon, all those Hebrews. They were Jews, weren't they? . . . Well, if those Jews are on church windows, why can't my husband be a Jew?'

'You say that to yourself, Mariette?'

'And the tree of Jesse, did you see it? All those Jews our Lord's ancestors! And Ruth, the heathen, who was the wife of Boas, the Hebrew. And Jesus who descends from Boas and the heathen woman! And I must not marry a Jew! . . . Those are the things I tell myself instead of praying!' . . .

'My darling! My darling!'

'But I know . . . they are sinful thoughts. And I am punished: instead of saving you I shall be damned with you! I can't pray any more!'

The bell tinkles. The priest kneels. The two old ladies cross themselves. Mariette is crying.

'You will be my wife, Mariette! Swear that you will be my wife.'

'Be quiet! Listen. . . . Mass! . . . It is a great, great sin!'

'You will be my wife! Swear, swear!'

'I don't know . . . I don't know now.'

'Do you remember your little ring? I still have it. Swear you will be my wife!'

'I don't know now . . . I don't know now.'

'Come, let's go.'

'No. Leave me.'

'To-morrow I'll wait for you.'

'No, don't wait for me . . . don't look for me . . . don't be on the look-out for me. . . . I must pray . . . I must think!'

'Will you come quite alone, as to-day? Promise!'

'When I know . . . yes, perhaps . . . I'll come . . . I'll tell you.' . . .

'You will come! I know you will come!' . . .

The bell tinkles. The old ladies cross themselves. Mariette is crying.

I look at Christ, at Christ on that big Cross, at Christ who made me suffer so.

. . . Given by Pope Pius IX to the Emperor Napoleon. . . .

§ 6

I talked during the whole of dinner! 'Two days' camp, that changes a man! I was so excited I told them everything, all of a jumble. Father looked at me, delighted. Mother felt my pulse; she always has to be anxious! . . .

I have a khaki shirt now. And a scarf and a pole. I have been through my 'Initiation,' which is worth

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as much as a Bar-Mitzvah. I am one of the Crocodile patrol. My name is Tanika. My call, Mou-a-ër! . . .

And I showed them all I knew! A single knot, a double knot, a weaver's knot, a sailor's knot. . . . Why shouldn't I know how to tie them? Am I sillier than anyone else?

When the Great Akela pretended to have lost his compass, I was quite up to laying my watch flat down, the dial uppermost, the small hand pointing sunwards; I placed a pencil in the right place across the dial, to divide it into equal parts, at right angles between the twelve and the small hand, and I succeeded perfectly in finding the South!

And at Bois-le-Rois, when the width of the Seine had to be found. I spotted a big tree on the other bank. I stood bang opposite it. I paced out sixty metres and planted my pole; then I paced another thirty metres, turned at right angles, and then walked until I saw my tree and my pole in line; then I measured the distance between where I stood and the apex of my right angle, multiplied it by two, and it came out right!

Later we had competitions. The Scout instinct! I have, it seems, the Scout instinct. I guessed everything Great Akela had stuffed into his five paper bags: leather, roses, aniseed, violets, orange-peel: placed first!

And the Kim game. There were at least twenty objects on the covered tray. It was uncovered for just

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half a minute. And in the half-minute I had time to notice: a bud, a black rag, a red rag, a cork, a yellow rag, a blue pencil, a knotted piece of string, a red pencil, a penknife, a stone marble, a cornelian marble and a five-sou piece: placed first!

And later, during the bear hunt. I was the bear, I wore the collar and the inflated bladder, which represented my heart. I ran from one lair to another; they tried to burst my heart with their straw clubs, whilst I belaboured their hats with mine; each hat off, a dead man. Well, they didn't get me! I did for the lot of them! Yes, all the eleven!

But what surprised them the most was during the 'watch,' round the fire, which lit up the darkness. They were seated in a circle, feet to the flames, which shone on the banners. Several of the boys volunteered to do 'turns.' Live Squirrel juggled with three bottles. Silent Deer, Hoarse Jackal and Peaceful Zebra gave a dumb show of the Diamond Thief. Monotonous Toad sang the Matabeles' war song. And I, what was the source of my jolliness? . . . Mariette, I know! . . . I invented a character, a real character, the 'Charlie Chaplin Scout!'

The Chaplin Scout wants to put his enemy off his track: he takes off his boots and digs up the earth with a spade wherever he has trodden! The Chaplin Scout wants to gauge the width of a puddle: he ladles up the

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water with a saucepan, places it over a dead match, and counts aloud until the water boils, then multiplies by a hundred. The Chaplin Scout wants to find his way by the Pole Star. He photographs it, in the dark, and then tests the direction of the wind by the waving of the film. The Chaplin Scout wants to make himself useful: he empties his fountain-pen on to the flames to stop a fire. The Chaplin Scout wants to prove that he knows how to behave: he raises his first, middle and fourth fingers, according to rule, and then blows his nose between his thumb and his little finger!

How they laughed! And on the spot they christened me the 'Life and Soul of the Patrol!'

And this is but the beginning! First in French, first in Latin, that is not enough! I want to have all the ribbons, all the certificates, all the stars! I shall be the best shot, the best signaller, the best life-saver! I shall be France's best Scout!

§ 7

She will come! I am sure she will come. But when? . . .

I shall not watch for her, I shall wait, I promised. . . .

There is a bookshop, Quai des Tournelles, where

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they sell rings, rings with blue, green and red stones. . . .

I have been looking at one, such a pretty one. But what's to be done? It is marked eighty-five francs, and I have only sixty-eight francs saved up.

Bargain? . . . That's too horrid!

§ 8

What happened? . . . What started me *thinking* again? . . .

Ah, now I remember. I had gone to bed, when suddenly, just as I was going to sleep, this thought came to me:

Out there, in Palestine, they too are Scouts . . . all that Styrinovsky told me about, the planting of forests, the building of schools, that rebirth of pride. Some are girls, who have left their studies to break stones on the roads; some are men of science, poets; draining marshes, up to their waist in mud.

Why? So that their fatherland be given back to them, Styrinovsky says? To become once more a nation, as others? To have suffered so much more than others, in order to become as others! . . .

It would be fine to encourage and help those Pales-

by Edmond Fleg

tinian Scouts from afar! Yes, and I swear I'll do it . . . with all my heart!

But to follow them, imitate them, give up my life to them, that would be finer still. . . . Could I?

Leave Mariette, Mother, Father and my Island between my two bridges, could I?

And as I dropped off to sleep I said to myself again: 'Could I? Could I?'

And I went to sleep.

Are these visions or dreams? Was it thus that the prophets saw? Am I a prophet?

I slept and I dreamed.

And in my dream I was lying in my bed, and I looked about me. And I saw all the seas: the Red Sea and the White Sea, the Black Sea, the Yellow Sea, and all the Seas and all the Oceans. The Pacific and Atlantic, the Arctic and the Antarctic. And a wind blew over the waters. And the wind, like the blade of a mighty plough, that I saw not, cleaved the waters. And the green waters and the blue, and the yellow and the black and the white and the red, separated, and the seas parted. And dry roads gleamed between the parted waves. And the dry roads, intersecting, formed a great star, like a cross-roads in a forest, and the forest

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was of waves. And in the heart of the star was a land flowing with milk and honey, green with vines and palms.

And I was lying in my bed, and I looked about me, and I felt a weight on my hands and heart. And as I dreamed I said to myself: 'But it was in bygone days that the Hebrews went over the Red Sea on dry land.'

And suddenly the Hebrews of to-morrow passed over, dry foot, between the red and yellow, the black and white, the green and blue waves of all the seas! They wore all kinds of clothing, they were of all ages, of all casts of feature, and spoke all tongues. And along all the roads cut through the waters, by the rays of the immense star, I saw a motley multitude advancing. Labourers, navvies, tailors; carpenters with their saws, masons with their trowels, shepherds with their crooks, rabbis unrolling their scrolls, chemists bearing their retorts, astronomers focussing their telescopes, nurses pushing stretchers. . . . What a horde of caftans, frock-coats, overalls, burnouses, smocks, veils, fichus, aprons, turbans! . . .

And I could see their faces so well! They were so near to me, so familiar. How could I recognise those millions of faces?

There were rosy cheeks, pallid cheeks, parchment-like cheeks; hair frizzy or sleek, black, auburn, white,

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fair; flat foreheads, arched foreheads, narrow foreheads, broad foreheads; noses straight, aquiline, squat; thin-lipped mouths, broad-lipped mouths; avaricious eyes, sorrowful eyes, ecstatic eyes.

How different all those faces, and yet how similar! Whom do they resemble? Me, perhaps?

And the singing which rose from the midst of the waves! All the voices of all those crowds on all those roads. Those appeals to me, in all those tongues which I did not understand. It was like a poem with music. I did not know the words; suddenly their meaning is clear:

‘Come with us, come with us!’

‘From all the mountains and from all the plains, from all countries and from all continents, we are on our way!

‘From all torments and from all shame, from exile from homesteads, we are on our way!

‘We are on our way to those mountains which are our mountains; towards plains which are our plains; to sow harvests which are our harvests; to endure ills which are our ills; to know joys which are our joys; to think thoughts which are our thoughts; to love a fatherland which is our fatherland, so that Humanity

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may become a fatherland! Come with us! Come with us!'

And I cried aloud, 'I want to go, I want to follow you.'

But no sound came from my lips. And I tried to rise and I could not. There were weights on my hands, on my heart. And I looked; on my hands were my Father's hands, my Mother's hands, and Mariette's hand was on my heart.

And the multitude chanted: 'Come with us! Come with us! Come with us!'

And I struggled to tear myself from my bed, to follow them, and I panted, I suffocated. And I shook my bed with all my might. And my bed was not a bed. It was an island, my Island between my two bridges. And my feet were riveted to the parapet, and my wrists to the garden railings, and on my heart was the fountain in the garden.

And still, I could hear: 'Come with us! Come with us!'

And I answered in a voiceless voice: 'Wait for me! I want to follow you . . . I am coming, I am coming.' . . .

And I suffocated and I gasped; I was paralysed. And my bed was no longer an island, it was a country. All

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the rocks of Brittany were upon my right arm, all the peaks of the Vosges were on my left arm, and on my feet all the Alps; and Paris, the whole of Paris, was on my heart!

And I called aloud: 'Israel, Israel, thy Law is not my law, thy Fatherland is not my fatherland. What must I do to be a Jew? What must I do?'

Then there was a great silence, then a whisper coming down from afar.

'Hasten his advent!'

And there was a great light, and in that light a great Cross, and on that Cross Jesus, bleeding, agonised. And he said:

'The Messiah of Peace, the Messiah of Justice, he whom I wished to be, he whom I was not, the Messiah, the Messiah, hasten his advent.'

§ 9

So it is impossible to live like others, with others? A Jew! I am a Jew! I must hasten the Messiah's coming, the Messiah of Peace, the Messiah of Justice. I must hasten his coming!

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Jew! You are a Jew! A Jew forgets not God! . . .

I re-read what Jeremiah cried out to the Lord: . . .
'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more
in His name. But His word was in mine heart, as a
burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with
forbearing and I could not stay.' . . .

I, I to hasten his coming? What am I?

The Jews. . . . It is said they await him, this Messiah, who will be Justice and Peace on earth. It was to them that he announced his coming. It is their mission to bring about his coming. But what do they do to bring him? Do they as much as think of him? A word or two in their lengthy prayers—that is all. And their holidays! What are their holidays to do with the Messiah? Their Passover, their Great Fast, their Sabbath, does the Messiah bother about them? . . . And their forbidden food, and the food which is allowed? And those in Palestine, what are they out there doing for the Messiah?

So, what is needed for him to come? Change their religion? . . . I, a child, could I change a religion?

But brave Joan of Arc, what was she when the Voices spoke with her? A child! A child like me.

And she listened, she obeyed, she went. . . .

And I, should I not go? . . .

by Edmond Fleg

To serve France, yes, it is splendid! But to serve Israel! To serve the world! . . .

§ 10

She will come! I am sure she will come.

But what shall I tell her now, when she comes?

§ 11

I took back the rabbi's book.

'You should have kept it, my young friend. It will be my present for your Bar-Mitzvah.'

'I don't think I shall be Bar-Mitzvah, sir.'

The rabbi looks at me. . . . How discouraged he seems.

'You will not be Bar-Mitzvah?'

'No, not yet, sir. I am not worthy yet. . . . It is so difficult to be a Jew: those six hundred and thirteen commandments! . . . To live in the ghetto, behind the Hôtel de Ville. . . .'

'You will observe as much as you can, my child. Our God is not exacting!'

'But the Law is the Law, sir? Am I wrong? The Scouts have their Law; they don't pick and choose, they obey. It is all or nothing.' . . .

The rabbi clears his throat.

‘Have I said something silly?’

‘I am afraid so, my child. The Law is not everything. It is the spirit of the Law which is everything.’

‘That’s just it. It must be understood. . . . But the holidays . . . the observances. . . . Forgive me, please, sir, no one understands them now. Ah, I did a lot of thinking when I was reading your book.’

‘You thought a lot?’

He smiles crookedly, like Father.

‘Yes, sir. . . . Above all, about the Messiah, the Messiah of Peace and Justice. Ah, if all the holidays and observances were to make us think more about the Messiah, to hasten his coming, to make God send him sooner, then our religion would become the Messiah’s religion, the Messiah of Peace and Justice, him for whom the whole world is waiting. And everything would be clear! All would be understood! For instance, Passover: at Passover, the Red Sea would be the blood of all the wars, over which the Messiah must cross in his coming. At Kippur, the Fast would be the penance for our sins, because our sins hinder the Messiah in his coming. At Rosh Hashana,¹ the trumpet . . . it would be blown to summon the Messiah. At Succoth,² the palm would be waved for all the prophets of all the peoples who foretold the Messiah. And the Sabbath rest would be in honour of the rest

¹ ROSH HASHANA: New Year.

² SUCCOTH: Tabernacles.

by Edmond Fleg

which the Messiah will give the world one day. If we should eat, if we should live differently from others, we should know why: in order to preserve the race which is to give birth to the Messiah. Palestine must live again, why? Because in Palestine he must be born. We should renounce evil, lying, cheating, coveting, stealing, killing and blasphemy to prepare ourselves to receive him, to make ourselves worthy of receiving him. We should love our neighbours as ourselves, we should love God with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our might, so as to merit the sight of the Messiah's reign, of his peace, his justice and his love. . . . That is what I thought about, sir. Well, if that were Judaism, don't you think it would be understood? And that all Jews would become Jews again? The first time you saw me, you told me, "All true Jews are priests." If all true Israelites became prophets, prophets of Peace and Justice, true prophets of Peace and Justice, true prophets of the Messiah, don't you think that all true men would become Jews?'

The rabbi's smile is not crooked now. There is a tear, yes, a tear, shining in the corner of his eye. As he wipes it away his fingers tremble. . . .

But why has his other expression suddenly returned?

He looks at me, he looks at the ceiling, he sighs and says:

' Another reformer! '

And he smiles, and he adds:

'How old are you, my child?'

'Nearly fifteen.'

'Fifteen! Take care of your fifteen years, my child!

In the days of Moses a man could be a prophet at eighty. . . . In our days, to be a prophet one must be fifteen!'

§ 12

She came!

It was on the fourteenth of July. She came for the fireworks.

I still love fireworks as much as I did when I was small. When I saw the red, green, blue stars falling, I said to Nannie:

'Won't they burn the water?'

Nannie answered:

'No, darling, water doesn't burn.'

We stationed ourselves at the window of my room. The others watched from the drawing-room balcony.

Oh, the whistle of the soaring rockets! That shower of stars, which shrinks and shrinks into an ever-narrowing stem and, right at the end, ever so high, the bomb splits; then the sudden silence, and the liberated seeds sink slowly through the night.

by Edmond Fleg

'You have come, Mariette . . . you have come.
. . . See, to-day it is I who give you a ring.'

I had the ring all ready in my pocket, the ring I had bought in the bookshop, the ring with the blue stone.

I offer it to her. She won't take it. She does not look at it. Why?

I try to put it on her finger. She withdraws her hand. Why?

'Don't you want my ring, Mariette?'

Silver suns are revolving on the bridge. Sheets of spangles go streaming into the water.

'Don't you want my ring?'

'I have been praying again, Claude, I can pray again.'
How harsh her voice is.

'Ah . . . you, pray.' . . .

The word terrifies me.

'You pray . . . then . . . at the altar, you don't think of me any more? . . . And the questions you put to yourself . . . Ruth, Boas, the Hebrews in the stained-glass windows . . . all those sinful questions?'

. . .

'My confessor has explained everything to me. I understand now.'

'What do you understand?'

The Bengal lights throw up a yellow-green glow. The trees yonder stand out like phantoms at the cor-

ner of the bridge. All the houses on the Island show up, to their very roofs.

I can see Mariette now. She too is like a phantom.

‘What do you understand? What have you understood?’

‘It is just as I told you, Claude. A Jew and a Christian.’ . . .

‘A Jew and a Christian. . . . Well . . . what . . . speak.’ . . .

‘A Jew and a Christian.’ . . .

I can’t hear. I guess from her lips:

‘. . . It is a sin, a great sin!’

‘You don’t want to be my wife? You don’t want to be my wife?’

How tightly I hold her. How she trembles in my arms! . . .

What is this sudden feeling? . . . I have never had that sensation before. . . .

‘Leave me, Claude, leave me alone . . . I am going away!’

‘You are going away?’

‘To-morrow.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘Only for the holidays. . . . Father has consented.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘To pray for you. I hadn’t prayed enough.’

‘Where are you going? Where are you going?’

by Edmond Fleg

'Six weeks . . . only for six weeks.'

'Where? Where?'

'To a convent.'

'A convent?'

If only I could keep quiet. I can't. The words came of their own accord:

'Don't go to a convent. . . . They don't know, in convents . . . they don't know that Jesus is not God, is not the Messiah!'

'Claude!'

How pale she is in the green light!

'He told me so himself; that he is not the Messiah! He said so. I have to hasten his coming, the Messiah of Peace and Justice, our Messiah, the real Messiah, Israel's Messiah; the world is waiting for him!'

'I shall go to the convent. I shall stay in the convent all my life.' . . .

'Mariette! Mariette!'

'I shall pray for the Jews, I shall pray for the Jews all my life!'

She has run to the door. . . .

'Mariette! Mariette!'

I could not go after her. Why? . . . I called to her through the window:

'Mariette! Mariette!'

The Boy Prophet

What machine-guns are crackling? I can't hear my own voice. The set-pieces below are throwing up stars to the sky.

Then nothing! Night.

The stars fall. When I was little I used to say to Nannie, 'I'll go and pick them up to-morrow.'

I know now that they are extinguished!



YOU will be surprised, Mother darling, to find this bundle of paper . . . if I dare put it under your music one of these days, as I want to. . . . Because, you know, I am still undecided! I am like Cæsar at the Rubicon in Roman History. Shall I cross, or stay on the bank? My Rubicon is your grief, Mother: a hard river to cross.

You will say:

‘What’s this? My little son has been thinking of such things all this time and has hidden his thoughts from me!’

Do you remember how you used to take me on your knees; how you used to cuddle me, kiss me, ask me:

‘Has anyone hurt you, Claude darling? What are you thinking about? Why are you sad?’

And I used to hear you say to Father:

‘There is something the matter with the child. He is so sensitive. Unkind companions, perhaps; you ought to find out!’

No, Mother darling, my companions aren’t unkind. No, no, no one has been unkind to your Claude; no one has hurt him. It is only I myself who make myself suffer, I and . . .

The Boy Prophet

You will read on. . . . I have tidied up all these papers for you. Ah, there was a muddle . . . worse than *Les Pensées de Pascal*, I assure you . . . some were short, some long . . . there were rough drafts and copies; and those I scribbled in class, while the boys were reciting the Greek declensions, or the Hundred Years' War; and those I composed in my head, on my way home from school, on the Pont St. Louis, while the barges were swinging round the Island. . . . And others which I scrawled at night, when I couldn't get to sleep.

The ideas must lack 'cohesion,' the composition 'clarity,' as would say Bordier, our literature master. It is, at least, an exercise, which may have 'formed my style'; the last 'bits' are better composed than the first, I hope. But have I myself improved since I started?

And why all this work? Because you found me too old for my years? Because I was first in French? Because I was called 'the future author'? Or because I am little proud of already having a 'History of my life,' and of being able to relate it? A little of all these things, perhaps. But there is something else, Mother: I have taken a very big resolution. You must know about it, so as to explain it to Father, and you must both help and understand me.

Would it be right that Mariette should pray for

by Edmond Fleg

the Jews all her life, and that I should do nothing for them? . . .

I want to do, as the kind priest said, what Jesus told me to do: I want to be a Jew.

I want to remind them of their Messiah, the Messiah of Peace and Justice, so that their religion be the Messiah's religion; that all men, one day, may be prophets of the Messiah, and that the Messiah should come, that he should come!

Will you help me, Mother darling?

To-morrow you will find all this bundle under your music. You will read it! You will read it! Father too will read it! Will he understand? Will you understand? Will you both help me? . . .

Read, read! And above all, don't smile; it is written with my soul . . . if I have one!



AND what if they were both to smile! If they were not to understand! . . .

Already I can hear Father saying: 'Do you know what profession my son has chosen? He wants to be a prophet!' . . .

No, no. . . . I must keep my papers! I must keep them! . . .

Later on! . . . When I am a man! . . .

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